

The Joan Palevsky



Imprint in Classical Literature

In honor of beloved Virgil—  
"O degli altri poeti onore e lume . . ."

—Dante, *Inferno*

# GREEK BIOGRAPHY AND PANEGRIC IN LATE ANTIQUITY

EDITED BY

TOMAS HÄGG

AND PHILIP ROUSSEAU

*with the assistance of Christian Høgel*

University of California Press  
Berkeley · Los Angeles · London

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the generous contribution to this book provided by Joan Palevski

University of California Press  
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.  
London, England

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#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Greek biography and panegyric in late antiquity / edited by  
Tomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau ; with the assistance of  
Christian Høgel.

p. cm.—(The transformation of classical heritage ; 31)

Papers originally presented at a conference at the Centre  
for the Study of European Civilization, Faculty of Arts,  
University of Bergen (Norway), August 28–31, 1996.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 0-520-22388-8 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Greek prose literature—History and criticism—  
Congresses. 2. Authors, Greek—Biography—History  
and criticism—Congresses. 3. Greece—Biography—  
History and criticism—Congresses. 4. Biography as a  
literary form—Congresses. 5. Praise in literature—  
Congresses. I. Hägg, Tomas. II. Rousseau, Philip.  
III. Høgel, Christian. IV. Series.

PA3043 .G74 2001  
888'.010809—dc21

00-028710

Manufactured in the United States of America

09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum  
requirements of ANSI / NISO Z39.48-1992 (R 1997)  
(Permanence of Paper). ©

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## Preface

With one exception, the chapters in this collection originated as papers presented to an international symposium at the Centre for the Study of European Civilization, Faculty of Arts, University of Bergen (Norway), August 28–31, 1996. The symposium was arranged within the framework of a research project, "Rhetoric and the Translation of Culture," headed by Professors Jostein Børtnes and Tomas Hägg and supported by the Research Council of Norway (under the programme "KULT II"). Its aim was to focus on the role played by literature and, in particular, by Greek biographical and panegyric works, in the transition to a Christian Hellenic culture in late antiquity.<sup>1</sup>

The contributors to the symposium—invited as representative of a variety of academic disciplines: ancient history, Church history, classics, comparative literature, patristics, and religion—were encouraged to choose their own texts and emphases, under the general theme of the research project and within the late antique period. The object was, not to achieve an exhaustive study of the topic with every relevant text of the period discussed in accordance with its relative importance, but to present illuminating case studies and provide generous scope for the interests and expertise of each contributor. Many of the chapters converge, in fact, on two key texts of the fourth century, respectively representing biography and panegyric: Athanasius's *Life of Antony* and Gregory of Nazianzus's funeral oration on Basil the Great. They are preceded by examination of Pythagorean and Neoplatonic lives from around A.D. 300 and of the *Life of Constantine*; and they are followed by inquiry into Themistius's private orations and into collective biographies from around A.D. 400—Eu-

1. Other publications resulting from the same project are Christian Høgel, ed., *Metaphrasis: Redactions and Audiences in Middle Byzantine Hagiography* (KULT's skriftserie 59; Oslo: Research Council of Norway, 1996), and Jostein Børtnes and Ingunn Lunde, eds., *Cultural Discontinuity and Reconstruction: The Byzanto-Slav Heritage and the Creation of a Russian National Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Slavica Norvegica 9; Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1997).

napius and the *Historia monachorum*—and by comment on a specimen of Syriac Hellenism, the *Life of Rabbula*, a fifth-century bishop of Edessa. In addition, the biographical works of Gregory of Nyssa and Jerome and the *Life of Pachomius* are brought into the discussion of our key texts.

The chapters have been revised, some of them even substantially reworked, in the light of the discussions during the symposium and of comments provided by the editors. A couple of the original papers have been omitted, and David Konstan's chapter, "How to Praise a Friend: St. Gregory of Nazianzus's Funeral Oration for St. Basil the Great," has been added. The introduction, "Biography and Panegyric," rather than summarizing the main points of each individual contribution, endeavors to pick out in particular (and on occasion supplement or further illuminate) matters specifically relating to the literary form of the texts that our contributors have chosen to discuss from their various angles.

Scholars tend to use collections like the present one piecemeal. Hence our decision to let each contribution have its own bibliography, to allow some repetitions, and to dispense largely with cross-references. The unity of the collection resides in the common theme and period, and part of it is articulated in the introduction; it is to be hoped that the indices will serve users of the book better than the occasional cross-reference to locate the different discussions of the same texts or topics.

Our thanks are due, first and foremost, to the contributors for their industry, loyalty, and patience; to Christian Høgel (research fellow within the project) for attending to references, bibliographies, and indices; and to Peter Brown for welcoming the book to the series.

It is only fair to add that two important collections of papers appeared too late for our contributors to be able to take account of them: M. J. Edwards and S. Swain, eds., *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), and Mary Whitby, ed., *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1998). For similar reasons, the editors have not used those works to broaden the framework of the discussion beyond that marked out by the symposium itself.

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## Abbreviations

For full bibliographical data, see References at the end of each chapter.

<i>Abst.</i>	Porphyry, <i>De abstinence/On Abstinence</i>
<i>AP</i>	<i>Apophthegmata Patrum/The Sayings of the Desert Fathers</i>
<i>Cure</i>	Theodoret of Cyrrhus, <i>Graecarum affectionum curatio/Cure of Hellenic Maladies</i>
<i>DVPyt</i>	Iamblichus of Chalcis, <i>De vita Pythagorica/On the Pythagorean Life</i>
<i>Enn</i>	Plotinus, <i>Enneads</i>
<i>HE</i>	Rufinus of Aquileia, <i>Historia ecclesiastica/Church History</i>
<i>HM</i>	<i>Historia monachorum in Aegypto/History of the Monks in Egypt</i>
<i>HR</i>	Theodoret of Cyrrhus, <i>Historia religiosa/Religious History</i>
<i>LC</i>	Eusebius of Caesarea, <i>Laus Constantini/Praise of Constantine</i>
<i>Marc.</i>	Porphyry, <i>Ad Marcellam/To Marcella</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Graeca</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1857–66)
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1841–55)
<i>PLRE</i>	<i>Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , ed. A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, and J. Morris (Cambridge, 1971–92)
<i>PO</i>	<i>Patrologia orientalis</i> , ed. R. Graffin and F. Nau (Paris, 1904–)
<i>VA</i>	Athanasius, <i>Vita Antonii/Life of Antony</i> (Greek version)
<i>VC</i>	Eusebius of Caesarea, <i>Vita Constantini/Life of Constantine</i>

VGThaum	Gregory of Nyssa, <i>De Vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi/Life of Gregory Thaumaturgos</i>
Vit.	Diogenes Laertius, <i>Vitae philosophorum/Lives of Eminent Philosophers</i>
VMacr.	Gregory of Nyssa, <i>Vita Macrinae/Life of Macrina</i>
VP	Porphyry, <i>Vita Plotini/Life of Plotinus</i>
VP/Bo	<i>Vita Pachomii Bohairice scripta/Life of Pachomius (Bohairic version)</i>
VP/G	<i>Vita Pachomii Graeca/Life of Pachomius (first Greek version)</i>
VP/S	<i>Vita Pachomii Sahidice scripta/Life of Pachomius (Sahidic version)</i>
VPaul	Jerome, <i>Vita Pauli/Life of Paulus</i>
VPyt	Porphyry, <i>Vita Pythagorae/Life of Pythagoras</i>
VS	Eunapius, <i>Vitae philosophorum et sophistarum/Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists</i>
VSoph.	Philostratus, <i>Vitae sophistarum/Lives of the Sophists</i>

## Introduction

### *Biography and Panegyric*

TOMAS HÄGG AND PHILIP ROUSSEAU

#### DEFINITIONS AND DISTINCTIONS

Two hundred years of cultural translation, ca. A.D. 250–450, and two genres, biography and panegyric, provide a formal frame for the texts to be discussed in this volume. The “translation,” of course, was that of ancient Hellenism into Christian Hellenism, as expressed in literature. Our contributors, from their different angles and with different emphases, show how literary works with the lifespan of an individual as their ordering principle (rather than an idea or a chain of events) help to reveal that transition to us. The topoi and rhetorical strategies were largely inherited and shared, as was the basic narrative structure of a “life”; but the selection and combination involved, and the uses those means of expression were put to, made the portraits distinctly different, in accordance with the worldviews they conveyed.

To speak of two genres, however, is to ask for trouble. It would be more appropriate, for the period we are studying, just to call them two sets of texts, one overtly panegyric in form, the other biographical: for it is precisely the transgression of the boundaries between them, their interaction and coalescence, that is most in evidence. After all, that is what makes it meaningful to treat both sets within the same covers and address the same questions to them. Much of the discussion here will appeal both to the essence of each genre and to the traditional or actual differences between them, in order to characterize the individual texts themselves more accurately.

## ORIGINS

It is arguable that biography—to use the modern term rather than the ancient *bios*—is the broader concept, which includes panegyric as one of its possible forms. Historically, however, the beginnings of the two genres in the fourth century B.C. were distinct. Isocrates, in the introduction to his *Evagoras* (ca. 370 B.C.), a homage to the dead Cypriot tyrant, makes it plain that he was the proud inventor of the *prose encomium of contemporary persons*—each component of the generic designation being essential, he knew, if his claim were to be upheld. The epideictic speech is, as it were, the “home base” of this innovation, and it remains so for “pure” panegyrics. This rhetorical setting guarantees for the panegyric genre a number of constant topoi and strategies.<sup>1</sup> Biography, on the other hand, as a typically bookish product, is much more versatile—and elusive. The point is not that panegyrics were necessarily performances, but that they pretended to be. Biography, to find a corresponding natural home, sometimes masqueraded as a letter.<sup>2</sup>

Isocrates starts off with an interesting piece of metapanegyric: what is he doing, he asks; why is he doing it; and is his talent equal to the task (*Evagoras* 1–11)? Calculated reflection on the art of praise remained a part of the genre, as also its professed twofold object: to praise, and to set an example for emulation. A third aim, to enhance the speaker’s own reputation, was not similarly spelled out, but is plain in Isocrates’ whole manner of dwelling on his own achievement as the first prose panegyrist of contemporaries. As we shall see in Frederick Norris’s contribution to the present book, these concomitant ambitions—“your honor, my reputation”—are still operative in

what is perhaps the most accomplished piece of panegyric oratory to survive from late antiquity, Gregory of Nazianzus’s funeral speech for Basil of Caesarea (*Oratio* 43)—a speech with a central place in our collection.

A speaker addresses an audience, and he is standing in person (we are to believe) before that audience. His own reputation is palpably at stake. The writer of a biography may, if he so wishes, hide behind his text. Where is Mark in his Gospel? What role is left to Xenophon in his *Memoirs of Socrates*, or to Athanasius in his *Life of Antony*, once the prefatory considerations have given way to narrative and impersonation? The paramount influence they still exert on their representation of a great figure is controlled in other ways. There is never the same open competition for attention as there is between a speaker and the object of praise. Instead, without our noticing it, the biographical subject often merges with the biographer’s own persona and agenda into one ideal whole: Socrates becomes the spokesman for Xenophon’s morality, and Antony for Athanasius’s view of asceticism.<sup>3</sup>

Like panegyric, Greek biography started in the fourth century B.C.; but it was born formless. The impact of Socrates’ personality gave rise to a series of biographically focused writings, but none of them endeavored to follow the master’s life stage by stage.<sup>4</sup> The masterpiece among them, Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*, has the form of forensic oratory and completely disregards chronology as an ordering principle. The *Phaedo* ends as a perfect biography, but happens to have covered only the last day of that life. Xenophon’s *Memoirs of Socrates* is a string of conversations, again without chronological structuring or regard for any progress in the philosopher’s thinking or behavior. What order there is may be found in the successive coverage of Socrates’ various interests and opinions. To find a firm structure, Xenophon steps into Isocrates’ domain and writes his *Agésilas*, an encomium of the Spartan king. But he brings with him from his biographical practice two habits, those of hiding behind his object and, after telling the life story proper, of dwelling systematically on the traits of his hero’s character. Although the actual terms were not used until much later, of course, this invention—the partition of a

1. The modern handbook of ancient panegyric is Pernot, *Rhétorique de l’éloge dans le monde gréco-romain*, with extensive bibliography. For the late antique period, see also Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*. On the term *panegyric*, see Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, 1–3. For a stimulating discussion of Isocrates and the nature of panegyric, see Rewa, *Reborn as Meaning*.

2. Leo, *Griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form*, the old standard work on ancient biography, is still indispensable; also useful is Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography*. Of modern studies, the works by Steidle and Dihle (see References below) are particularly important, and see also Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*. The brilliant essay by Momigliano, *Development of Greek Biography*, is only a torso; it stops where the real fun begins. With regard to the biographical genre in general, there is no shortage of literary critical studies—see Rollyson, *Biography: An Annotated Bibliography*—but works of a more theoretical nature are rare; see, however, Shelston, *Biography*; Madelénat, *Biographie*; and Nadel, *Biography*.

3. On this phenomenon, which some call “transference,” see, e.g., Edel, *Writing Lives*, 65–92, and Clifford, *From Puzzles to Portraits*, 99–112.

4. See, in particular, Dihle, *Studien zur griechischen Biographie*.

work into *bios*, "life," and *politeia*, "way of life"<sup>5</sup>—dominated part of the subsequent biographical tradition, becoming standard practice in Christian hagiography. Some detect it also in the other text central to our collection, the *Life of Antony*, written in the mid fourth century A.D.<sup>6</sup> Having in the first part followed the events of Antony's spiritual career in the order of their occurrence, Athanasius starts, in the second part, to group his material systematically: healing, arbitration, discussions with philosophers. It may be that this is less an inherited literary device than a natural answer to a biographer's need to pause and organize, once the subject of the biography has reached a plateau in life. With the account of Antony's old age and death, the chronological thread is found again and followed to the end.

From his Athenian master and his Spartan hero, Xenophon moved on to Cyrus the Great, and thus from contemporary Greece to historical Persia. His *Education of Cyrus* shows another aspect of biography's potential. The childhood and formative years of the figure come to the fore, and from this new emphasis there follows, almost necessarily, a liberation from historical bonds in favor of creative imagination. The childhood of a future celebrity is, naturally enough, almost never known in any detail, and biographers choose various expedients to fill the vacuum.<sup>7</sup> Athanasius, for instance, provides the proleptic variety, letting Antony as a child prefigure his career as a hermit and ascetic. Xenophon lets his imagination loose to paint a detailed picture of the education of his ideal leader. Biography is, from the start, a vehicle for ideas and for the embodiment of ideals, not—as some would have it—the poor relative of historiography, with historicity as its high but sadly unattainable goal.<sup>8</sup>

Here lurks one of the essential differences between our two genres. It is usual to regard panegyric as less reliable, because of its professed aim to praise, and to think of biography as (ideally) more his-

torically based. This is indeed what most biographers, including Athanasius, claim in their prefaces. But whereas encomiasts openly advertise their aim, biographers tend to have a hidden agenda. Orally performed panegyrics enjoy a control that biography lacks—the control, that is, exerted by their immediate audience against the blatant lie. Panegyrists exaggerate and also sin by omission, but everyone accepts this and expects them to select their material for the occasion. Biographers have the extra option of sinning by addition and invention: a reading public, spread out in time and space, will not be able to detect distortion or exchange criticism to the same extent as a present audience.

These were some preliminary propositions prompted by the first surviving specimens of Greek biographical and panegyric writing, but with relevance for much of the ancient tradition they launched as well. The discussion will continue presently, with the texts of late antiquity more specifically in focus and with closer attention to their particular historical and religious environment. First, however, we shall review, in chronological order, the corpus of texts to be treated in our collection, still with the issue of genre principally in mind.

## THE TEXTS DISCUSSED

Biography started, as we have observed, with the Socratic portraits presented by Plato and Xenophon—"portraits" rather than chronologically structured "lives." Philosophic biography, probably in a more *Life*-like form, continued in the second half of the fourth century B.C. with Aristoxenus. His lives of Socrates, Pythagoras, and others have, however, survived only in fragments—perhaps the most deplorable loss in the history of Greek biography.<sup>9</sup> What interests us here, however, is the new prospering of philosophic biography in the third and fourth centuries A.D.<sup>10</sup> Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (ca. A.D. 220) is the earliest full-scale work to survive that dresses a Pythagorean ideal in biographical guise.<sup>11</sup> It was followed

5. Cf. the similar distinctions between *πράξεις* and *ἐπιτηδεύματα/ἀρεταί/ἥθος*; for discussion of these terms, see Pernot, *Rhétorique*, 163–73, 210–14.

6. E.g., Reitzenstein, *Des Athanasius Werk über das Leben des Antonius*.

7. On such temporal "gaps" in the biographical material, and how they may be filled, see Kendall, *Art of Biography*, 18–21.

8. For example, Fornara, *Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome*, speaks of biography as "a genre . . . dominated by alien interests and predisposed to gross characterization and fraudulent exposition" (189). A classification of the genre according to the degree of historicity is attempted by Kendall, "Biographical Literature," 197f. For further examples and discussion, see Hägg, "Socrates and St. Antony," 83f.

9. See Momigliano, *Development of Greek Biography*, 73–89, 103.

10. On this insufficiently studied genre, see Hadas and Smith, *Heroes and Gods*; Alexander, "Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography"; Talbert, "Biographies of Philosophers and Rulers as Instruments of Religious Propaganda in Mediterranean Antiquity"; Dillon and Hershbell, *Iamblichus*, 6–14; and Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*.

11. See, most recently, Anderson, *Philostratus*; Koskenniemi, *Der philostratische Apollonios*; and Flinterman, *Power, "Paideia" and Pythagoreanism*.

at the end of the century or the beginning of the next by two works that gave preeminence to the divine Pythagoras himself. We should note how the distance between biographer and subject was thus increased. Aristoxenus was already at a couple of generations' remove from Socrates; Philostratus a century and a half from Apollonius; and now Porphyry and Iamblichus eight hundred years from their subject. Here, once again, is the freedom that biography may enjoy, in contrast to genuine panegyric.

Now, as Gillian Clark reminds us in her contribution to this book, neither Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras* nor Iamblichus's *On the Pythagorean Life* were written as separate biographies. Porphyry's life is the surviving part of a four-book work on philosophic history from Homer to Plato; but its didactic aim does not prevent the author from using the successive stages and varying geographical scenes of Pythagoras's life as a skeleton upon which the doxographical pieces can be hung. Iamblichus's work, as the title suggests, is designed to portray a "way of life," and it served as the introduction to a ten-book course for aspiring Pythagoreans. The ideal Pythagorean life, then, borrows its individual features from the "actual" life of the master; but this "actual" life, in its turn, is an amalgam of history and legend. Aristoxenus stood at an early and presumably crucial stage of this tradition; Apollonius of Tyana (first century A.D.), as the putative author of another lost biography of Pythagoras, at a later juncture.<sup>12</sup>

Another biographical text by Porphyry, his *Life of Plotinus* (ca. A.D. 301), exhibits a close relationship to Iamblichus's *On the Pythagorean Life*. Each is the protreptic introduction to the writings of its subject and, as Clark stresses, they share an apologetic purpose, trying to avert the attacks directed against the status of those writings. In other words, they are lives designed to vindicate the authenticity and inner unity of their subjects' oeuvres. Yet there is an important difference: Porphyry, as a biographer, has the additional advantage of being able to advertise himself as a follower of Plotinus and a direct witness to his life. Eyewitness credentials, whether real or faked, help to lend authenticity as well as immediacy to biography. The author of the Fourth Gospel understood these mechanisms well (John 19:35, 21:24), just as Porphyry did.

12. His authorship of the lost work is disputed; see Dzielska, *Apollonius of Tyana in Legend and History*, 130–34, and Dillon and Herschbell, *Iamblichus*, 9f.

From a formal point of view, the *Life of Plotinus* is the enfant terrible among ancient biographies, starting with the fatal illness and death of its hero, and, as Mark Edwards shows in his contribution, playing hide-and-seek with the date and place of his birth. A comparable emphasis on the master's death, combined with the elimination of his begetting, characterizes the Gospel of John and is among the common features that allow Edwards to describe Porphyry's work as a Neoplatonic gospel. The reluctance among theologians to acknowledge the gospels as specimens of ancient biography receives no support from ancient literary practice. Just as they had their generic fore-runners,<sup>13</sup> so also they attracted later emulators. Sharing a powerful literary form, Christians, Pythagoreans, and Platonists engaged in intricate competition, as well as in polemics more tacit than the apologetic genre would allow.

Historical or political biography is in short supply in this period. The only substantial example, Eusebius's *Life of Constantine* (published shortly after the emperor's death in A.D. 337), is notorious, not only for problems of date and authenticity, but also for difficulties in defining its literary form. It is a hybrid work, as Averil Cameron observes, with "Life" in its conventional title, but actually a mixture of documentary history and imperial panegyric. Whether this is the result of a prolonged writing process with shifting aims, or the deliberate creation of an author who knew what he was doing, is a matter of discussion. Cameron, in chapter 3, prefers to let the formal characteristics emerge from a comparison with that model biography, written only some twenty years later, Athanasius's *Life of Antony*—also, indeed, a political work, although in a less restricted sense.

In Cameron's reading, certain rhetorical strategies typical of biography emerge, such as a selective focus on the individual rather than on the historical events he is part of—although with an emperor in the spotlight, the distinction is obviously less clear-cut than with a spiritual hero. In addition, as Cameron shows, Eusebius, like Athanasius, develops certain biographical topoi, notably the emphasis on the hero's physical charisma, lasting through life, and the elaborate description of his illness and death, including the obsequies. In Antony's case, we may note, the biographer emphasizes that the place of his

13. See Burrige, *What Are the Gospels?*



burial was kept secret (VA 90–92), in contrast to the mausoleum that received Constantine's body.

Philip Rousseau's analysis makes clear the interaction between the narrated life of Antony as a model and his very "words" as a teacher—marked by Athanasius as such and quoted at length. By using direct speech as extensively as he does in Antony's long sermon (actually a quarter of the whole text), the author performs a delicate balancing act on the tightrope of trust: when do we hear Antony's voice, when that of his ghostwriter? Such "impersonation" is the biographer's privilege, not shared, at least on that scale, by the panegyrist. The audiences described in the book are made to listen, react, and engage in discussion, acting as models for readers to identify with and guiding them in their own act of reception. A model life without such a social context would have been less instructive, as Athanasius well knew. He makes Antony leave his isolation more often than not, to mix with disciples and representatives of the world.

With the *Life of Antony*, we are in the late 350s. The next fifty years saw an explosion of high-class, biographically oriented literature, mostly but not exclusively Christian, and with both our genres active separately or in various forms of combination. Some of these works serve, in Samuel Rubenson's chapter 5, to illuminate further the problem of Antony's educational position—now, in particular, the Abba's own relationship to classical education, as his biographer chooses to represent it. Among the biographies proper, the most important foil to the *Life of Antony* is the *Life of Pachomius*, in its first Greek version (the *Vita prima*, ca. A.D. 390). There is literary as well as ideological rivalry between the two great figures of early Egyptian monasticism. Biography is used in both cases to embody the ideals of the anchorite and the coenobite respectively; but, as Rubenson observes, the methods are different. The compiler of the *Life of Pachomius* is less concerned than his colleague with fusing his sources into one rhetorical whole. He is content—is this deliberate?—to leave them side by side to create a documentary impression. His subject is presented more as an individual in his historical context than as a model for emulation; and, like such persons in real life, he is surrounded and succeeded by other figures of the Pachomian movement, who also get their share of biographical attention—all traits that, through contrast, help us define the artfulness (some would say the artificiality) of the *Life of Antony*.

The most conscious continuator of the *Life of Antony* tradition, however, wrote in Latin. In his *Life of Paul the First Hermit* (ca. A.D. 375), as in his later *Life of Hilarion* and *Life of Malchus*, Jerome's main motivation, Rubenson contends, was to tell interesting stories. Whereas Athanasius wrote one *Life* only, in which he personified his ideal, Jerome used the form more light-heartedly to present a remarkable series of portraits, availing himself freely of motifs current in ancient lore and fiction. He set out, according to Rubenson, not so much to convince as to entertain. Again, the unique élan of the *Life of Antony* and the "asceticism" of its art become evident in comparison with these inheritors of its outer form.

A very different ethos meets us in the roughly contemporary biographical works by Gregory of Nyssa. All three, as Rubenson notes, are individual creations, which do not imitate or compete with the *Life of Antony*, even if it is probable that Gregory—like his namesake Gregory of Nazianzus—had read it; and they are very different from one another. His first essay, the *Life of Gregory Thaumaturgos*, is closest to standard biography in structure, following the future saint from school to bishopric, while stressing biblical prefiguration all along. His *Life of Macrina* is formally a letter commemorating his elder sister, in which he dwells in biographical detail on family, education, character revealed in action, and finally death and lasting importance—a model life. In his *Life of Moses*, by contrast, Gregory uses the biographical form for the incidental reason that the Genesis text to which he applies his philosophical exegesis happens to be biographically structured. One has the impression that Gregory in each case let his immediate aim shape his writing.<sup>14</sup>

This cannot very well be said of Gregory of Nazianzus. His funeral speech on Basil (*Oratio* 43, ca. A.D. 381), here approached from various angles by Frederick Norris, David Konstan, and Jostein Børtnes, has all the formal characteristics of a professional panegyric. Yet it transcends the formality of that form in several ways, some of which might be described as openings toward a more typically biographical attitude. Some of its grand dimensions, as well as its modulated personal tone, may be the result of Gregory's later "polishing" for

14. There is no systematic treatment of Gregory of Nyssa as a biographer; see however, Momigliano, "Life of St. Macrina by Gregory of Nyssa," and the studies collected in Spira, ed., *Biographical Works of Gregory of Nyssa*.

posterity to which Norris refers. So it is a book to be read rather than a speech to be performed—a transformation well established in the history of epideictic oratory.<sup>15</sup> The object of praise becomes not so much a model for emulation as a living person whose virtues are tested along the road, with his relationship to the speaker as the crucial touchstone. Gregory draws a portrait, a poignant image of his hero; for a hero Basil remains, in spite of Gregory's occasional complaints: the ideal bishop that Gregory himself never became, but also, through the prominence allotted to their shared student's life in Athens, a powerful alibi for Gregory's own love of Hellenic *paideia* (even if the nuances in their attitudes are allowed to appear also).

Comparing *Oratio* 43 with Gregory's eulogies of other persons—his father, his brother Caesarius, his sister Gorgonia, Athanasius, Cyprian—Norris shows how careful Gregory is, in spite of his dedication to the panegyric form, to shape his speeches according to the individual virtues of his subjects and the historical facts of their lives. Silence is at times a respectable expedient to avoid unpleasant detail,<sup>16</sup> but he refrains from filling in the actual blanks in a life with conventional matter. The rhetoric of friendship that he employs in his speech for Basil, here analyzed by David Konstan and Jostein Børtnes, is a prime example of the selection and personal adaptation of conventions that characterizes an accomplished rhetorician. No topos is found "pure" in such a speech; fusing and hybridizing is the rule. Moreover, the use of topoi in itself has no bearing on the question of historicity: a speaker may resort to a conventional form to give expression to a genuine emotion or recount an actual occurrence.

If the hero is described as the author's friend, notes Konstan, biography threatens to dissolve into autobiography, eulogy into boasting. The fact that Gregory's speech on Basil is more often looked upon as autobiographical than as boastful reveals the fusing of genres at work. A eulogy of quite another brand is that pronounced over Basil by his own brother, Gregory of Nyssa. If we compare this speech with that of the other Gregory, as Konstan does, it appears that the latter's insistence on the friendship between himself and the object of his praise is a key to understanding how his speech functions: it enfolds its subject in the human sphere; it is Gregory's tribute to his

friend as a friend. Since this friendship is not an asymmetrical one, not a master-disciple or father-son relationship, but—as Børtnes shows in detail—a love between equals, the speech exhibits an intimacy not often encountered in panegyrics. Gregory of Nyssa, in his *epitaphios*, marches off in the other direction: he even omits the conventional topoi of country, lineage, and family, depicting his brother as a man of God from the start, placing a barrier where Gregory of Nazianzus, a year or two later and perhaps (as Konstan suggests) as a deliberate reaction, remains much more personal and open.

The Constantinople that saw Gregory of Nazianzus fail as its bishop in 381 received Themistius as urban prefect in the middle of that decade. Mastery of the rhetoric of praise links the two in a more fundamental way. A "very adaptable" pagan in the service of Christian emperors, as Robert Penella notes in chapter 9, Themistius is mostly known for his imperial panegyrics; but there are encomiastic pieces or passages in his so-called private orations as well. In his *epitaphios* on his father, he compares him to Socrates and Heracles in his pursuit of philosophy and virtue, much as our Christian panegyrists use the great biblical figures as models and prefigurations. He omits several of the encomiastic topoi expected, such as family, birth, upbringing, and physical glory, to concentrate on his father's mature *paideia* and character, intriguingly promising fuller details in a planned biography. Are we to infer that he regards the lifespan structure and the topoi that theorists like Menander Rhetor prescribe for panegyric as more proper for biography? Or is the reason rather the brevity that the occasion demanded (making the *epitaphios* more like an authentic funeral speech)? Perhaps, as Penella suggests, the answer is that Themistius found it inappropriate to provide so much family detail in what he intended to be the portrait of a true philosopher. Similar considerations made Gregory of Nyssa omit the very same topics in praising his deceased brother Basil as a man of God.

In the last years of the fourth century, another form of biography appeared that was to attract several distinguished practitioners in the centuries to follow: collective biography. There was a tradition behind this form, diverse and tenuous though it might seem—Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, and Philostratus's *Lives of the Sophists*. There now appeared almost simultaneously an anonymous travel book, the *History of the Monks in Egypt*, and Eunapius's *Lives of Philosophers and Sophists*. For

15. See Pernot, *Rhétorique*, 465–75.

16. On omission as an expedient recommended by the theorists, see *ibid.*, 258f.

all their differences—in the organization of the miniature biographies they contain, and in their rhetorical ethos—they have interesting traits in common, some of which, as Patricia Cox Miller demonstrates, may be attributed to the conditions of the biographical collection as a literary form. The description of several individuals in the same discourse usually builds on the interplay of the similarities that inspired the collection in the first place, and the contrasts that make it alive and instructive. Plutarch's pairs display this double function, sameness and difference, most clearly. With their multiple portraits, Eunapius and the author of the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* were well aware of the challenge, and they comment on their methods in their own prologues. They both stress their emotional involvement with the people they describe. One relates, in the form of a travelogue, his conversations with holy men, recording the process of his own edification in order to provide for the gradual edification of his readers. As Arnaldo Momigliano defined the task in another context, he mediates "the intimacy between saint and reader by asserting the intimacy between saint and biographer."<sup>17</sup> Eunapius, for his part, as Cox Miller notes, conjures intimacy by presenting himself as the last link in the chain of Platonic philosophers whose lives he narrates, and by using erotic imagery to account for his writing. He too has as his aim the benefit of his readers, although his religion is Neoplatonism. In fact, it has been suggested that his collection was a pagan answer to the hagiographical boom of the late fourth century. Ancient biography that had been translated into Christian hagiography now became pagan hagiography. Cox Miller argues, however, that collective biography, when used for hagiography, by Eunapius as well as by the author of the *Historia monachorum*, shows an important innovation: the many lives narrated in a serial fashion are in fact only variants of one life, the holy life, Neoplatonic or Christian, which is impressed more firmly upon the reader's mind by this very multiplicity. Sameness takes precedence over diversity; or diversity is in the descriptive detail, sameness in the core. Each of these hagiographies wants to define the authentic human being.

So far, it has been a question of intralingual cultural translation and retranslation, the interactive and innovative use of traditional

17. Momigliano, "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion in the Roman Empire," 177.

literary forms among pagan and Christian writers. With the last text discussed in the present collection, the *Life of Rabbula* (ca. A.D. 450?)—regardless of whether it was originally written in Greek or in Syriac—we have an example of the interlingual translation of Greek Christian culture into Syriac Christian culture by means of biography. This is a sharp reminder (and attention to Latin sources would have reinforced the impression) that Christian literary endeavor, perhaps more than anything, enabled ancient genres to transcend their original confines. In his portrayal of the bishop of Edessa, the anonymous author presents, as his prologue puts it, an icon in words, to serve as a model for imitation. The painting metaphor, as Glen Bowersock points out, is traditional in Greek biography, but is used here in intensified form. The author then follows the usual biographical pattern from birth to death, coloring his description of the saint's career with the favorite Christian imagery of contest and triumph. The stadium, with its technical vocabulary of acclamation, appropriated to the spiritual victories of the Christian hero, may be seen as an emblem of the cultural translation taking place in late antiquity, filling established forms with novel meaning.

#### CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS: THE ISSUE OF REALISM

Biographies and panegyrics offer a vividness of portraiture analogous to the almost tangible and vibrant images on the mummy cases of Roman Egypt.<sup>18</sup> They make it seem possible to envisage the parade of ancient life, even its sounds, and the details of daily experience, of dress and gesture, of buildings, food, and entertainment. Even more, they invite us to believe we might gain access to the motives and sentiments of the subjects, their images of themselves, their ideals of behavior, their passionate ambition.<sup>19</sup> Such impressions are dangerously misleading, partly because the authors had points to make about themselves (or truths to hide), but also because their texts, operating as we have seen within a tightly controlled tradition, were

18. The "reality" of representation in the case of funerary art is as problematic as in literature; see Bierbrier, ed., *Portraits and Masks*.

19. In Brown, "Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," for example, the textual model of saintly mediator is made to serve as a reflection of economic relations.

carefully designed to modify the attitudes and conduct of those who read them.

So we are not presented with a peephole through which to observe an unsuspecting society. Both biography and panegyric acted as conscious mediators between admirers and heroes, whether living or not. On the one side, they pointed to their subject—the emperor, the man or woman of exemplary character and action. On the other side, they addressed an audience—challenged, shamed, excited, and instructed. The subjects, dead or alive, were brought vividly before the mind's eye only because biography and panegyric were acts as well as descriptive texts. That may not be difficult to recollect in the case of panegyrics, but is more easily forgotten in the case of biographies. In both instances, the “writer” was a dramatist, creating movement, posture, and costume, just as much as dialogue. We are faced with choreography, as well as syntax—a quality that was fundamental, prior to any consideration of what each genre may traditionally have demanded.<sup>20</sup> In the best exponents of this ancient skill, persona came before topos.<sup>21</sup>

#### THE RELATION BETWEEN AUDIENCE AND SUBJECT

These very observations serve to illustrate the enduring differences between the two enterprises. Putting it in the most basic terms, subject and audience were differently placed in relation to each other. There are a variety of ways in which we can expand upon that judgment. In the case of panegyric, the subject was “outside” the speech or the written text. The words of praise or recollection made sense, carried full weight, only because the audience could see the orator standing among them, and also (very often) the subject, the independent figure to whom the orator's words referred. It was in that sense that panegyric added to the personality of a subject, and brought them “honor.” In the case of biography, however, the hero

20. The theatricality of public life controlled its reflection in literary form. The text, presented orally, made a gesture on the public stage and became, when written, a crafted symbol of virtue and ambition.

21. Typology and narrative meld in a brilliant example—the meeting between Basil of Caesarea and the emperor Valens, as described by Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.* 43.47f.

was almost totally “interior” to the text. Biographies created their subjects. It scarcely mattered whether they had ever existed, or certainly whether they had existed as portrayed. It was portraiture in the abstract that gave weight to the text. The text itself became the de facto exemplar, serving to bring about in readers the moral change it appeared to describe in subjects.<sup>22</sup> Nothing so clearly distinguishes the potential deceits of our genres.

So the judgments passed upon Basil, as explored by Frederick Norris, David Konstan, and Jostein Børtnes, were governed to some degree by the audience's knowledge—perhaps of Basil himself; certainly that he was a real person, and that what was said by Gregory bore a verifiable or convincing relation to Basil's career and personality.<sup>23</sup> When we look, however, at the portraits examined by Patricia Cox Miller, Philip Rousseau, and Samuel Rubenson, or by Averil Cameron and Glen Bowersock, the existence of the subject (of Antony, certainly, and other ascetics; perhaps even of Constantine and Rabula) might have been useful as a reinforcement to admiration, but it was not the accuracy of the portrait that gave the text that force in readers' hands and hearts—not least because, as we have said, they were often in no position to detect sleight of hand or even outright fiction.

Matters are complicated by the fact that, from the outset, biography and panegyric were interwoven. Eusebius's *Life of Constantine* retained many characteristics of an ancient biography, with Eusebius's typical addition of supporting documents: yet it was written of a figure scarcely dead, and, while distinct from Eusebius's orations in honor of the emperor, was designed to praise as well as recommend. That interweaving introduced a special tension into the experience of a reader, and it reflects also upon the motives of writers. The obligation to preserve a memory and the invitation to emulate an ideal each contributed energy to the other, which goes far to explain the idiosyncratic quality of Christian hagiography. If Averil Cameron is correct in her analysis—making Constantine almost a saint—it is re-

22. When Antony emerges from his place of long retreat like a “mystic initiate” (VA 14.2), for example, the description is abstract and theological, priming the emotions and imagination of the reader. See Barnes, “Angel of Light or Mystic Initiate?” and the comments of Philip Rousseau in chapter 4 and Samuel Rubenson in chapter 5 below.

23. Gregory's delay in delivering his eulogy was an admission that such checks had to be accommodated: *Orat.* 43.2; Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 19.

markable that so early an example of Christian literary experiment should have been prompted by an emperor. In the Cappadocian context, on the other hand, the pairing is reversed: our fullest "biography" of Basil—Gregory of Nazianzus's speech—survives in panegyric form, yet without a funerary context, since it was almost certainly written some years after Basil's death. The delicacy called for was considerable, as the contributions already mentioned well declare: the impossibility of self-effacement; the exposure of intimacy; the proprietorial claim laid upon a reputation. We might imagine that any audience would have felt embarrassed, seeming to stumble upon a unique privacy. The importance of the memories appears at times peculiar to Gregory himself; the desirable degree of imitation is ambiguously defined: yet, for all the apparent candor of the text, there is more demanded of the reader than of Basil himself.<sup>24</sup>

#### THE RELATION BETWEEN AUDIENCE AND TEXT

That leads us to a second difference of relationship. In some instances, subject, author, and audience could engage with one another in a shared space. The sense of a subject's presence engendered or respected in panegyric (and even in some *consolationes*) might foster an immediate and shared awareness, which could then become a feature of the place where the words were spoken—the city, for example, that had recently witnessed the *adventus* of an emperor, or a monastery coming to terms with the loss of a founder or guide. The address would continue to reverberate within the scene of celebration, affecting the subsequent status and behavior of all who had heard it. The *Life of Constantine*, once again, has an oddly liminal character in this regard, since it speaks of the emperor almost as one still living.<sup>25</sup>

In other instances (and biography might seem a more obvious example), the text could achieve, or at least depend upon, a marked distance between its subject and its audience—a distance that might apply to the author as well, in spite of his role as mediator between the two. The text became the means whereby heroes could be transported, so that they were able to operate with effect in settings they

24. For the later creation of Basil's image, see also Momigliano, "Life of St. Macrina by Gregory of Nyssa."

25. The tone had already been set within living memory—for example, in Trier (where self-confidence endured for a century): *Panegyrici latini* 8, 10, and 11.

themselves had never experienced. So the Latin *Life of Antony*, described by Augustine in the *Confessions* (8.6.15), transports Antony, the star of the Egyptian desert, to the tranquil suburbs of Trier. Conversely, an audience could be invited, at least in their imaginations, into a space beyond their normal ken.<sup>26</sup> This "textual mobility" seems particularly characteristic of ascetic texts. That makes it dangerous to assume that the *Life of Antony* or the *Historia monachorum* were designed for a narrow ascetic audience entirely familiar with the milieux depicted in the texts. Features highlighted by Patricia Cox Miller, Samuel Rubenson, and Philip Rousseau need to be assessed in relation to such possibilities, which were at least sometimes envisaged by the biographers themselves. The standard topos that a hero's memory should be preserved contained within itself the powerful implication that that memory should be awakened with new effect in new situations. Moreover, we should observe how a text that was spatially contained in the first instance might become mobile later: indeed, this potential dynamism in a text's life seems an essential feature, which does much to explain how the specifically Christian genres of panegyric and biography developed. It was their proper nature to slip in this way beyond the sophisticated cliques that conceived them in the first place, colonizing the worlds of enchiridion and homily.<sup>27</sup>

It is true that a biography, at least in its earliest version, could be governed substantially by the intentions of its author; and the author could choose to operate within a close circle. It seems likely that Rabula's biography, for example, was directed in such a way: Glen Bowersock's analysis makes clear why it is so appropriate to extract from such a text, not only general reflections on virtue and religion, but also specific information about Edessa. Robert Penella, in his study of Themistius, is not initially surprised by an apparent narrowness of reference—even though it is quickly made evident how subtly readers were invited to lift their eyes to more general values. Every text examined in this book has that local element, which results, in the best examples, in vivid detail of setting and behavior.

26. Where they might experience the tension between the *étrangeté* of the ascetic and their own *espace urbain*, explored thirty years ago in Patlagean, "Ancienne hagiographie byzantine et histoire sociale"—still a study of fundamental importance.

27. A classic example in Greek would be the *Apophthegmata patrum*. The abstractions of religious biography are discernible behind many a pithy anecdote. See, e.g., the "portrait" of Abba Pambo provided in AP 12: his face shone like that of Moses at Sinai, and he sat like a king enthroned.

Nevertheless, the intentions of authors are always betrayed as abstract in the end. The technique of ambiguity involved we shall examine shortly. What demands attention here is the way in which the collusion of the audience was necessary in order to achieve, not simply a transition from particular to general, but rather an enduring symbiosis of the two. Each enhanced the other, so that descriptive precision became the guarantee of universal relevance, while the moral improvement of multiple readers fed upon the sharply defined image of the model. In this respect, the enthusiasms of the distant made their own demands. The privileged restlessness of pilgrims, the hunger of philosophers for novel transcendence combined with authentic tradition, the demand for a coherent and effective college of patrons and exemplars in the court of heaven: all such urgencies defined the market for the texts examined here, and imposed upon authors constraints as powerful as those inherent to their genres.

#### TASTE AND EXPECTATION

Expectations naturally affected readings also. Our ability to discover traditions in this literature, the persistence of themes and methods, reflects only the extent to which writers sized up the tastes of those whom they addressed and catered for what they saw. It would be both naïve and dangerous to suppose that panegyric and biography were haughty and optimistic gestures made by an enlightened cadre, who hoped thereby to perfect or polish dependent admirers. Texts survive much more because of "public demand" than because of elevated righteousness among those who produce them. Because of such pressures, we can catch texts out—detect them affronting their subjects, who may have borne little resemblance to their surviving portraits. Plotinus and Antony may have identified goals and achieved results in their own lives quite different from the goals and results their biographies were designed to aim at or achieve in the lives of others.<sup>28</sup> We have little way of telling, of course, how many "holy men," for example, failed the test of textuality: how many were unable to live up to the ideals imposed upon them by literary convention and audi-

28. The inability or unwillingness of Plotinus to leave a written legacy for his followers offered an ironic comment on the telltale prolixity of Porphyry, his Boswell; and Antony's declared hope that no one would venerate him after death was undermined by the very text that recorded it.

ence demand. Heroes did not function like texts. But the potential divorce between image and reality limits rather drastically the use we can make of biography and panegyric as keys to social experience.<sup>29</sup>

There must, nevertheless, have been limits of coherence and intelligibility beyond which no author could stretch the credence of his readers. Portraits had to be believable in order to be useful. Problems associated with reception, in other words, may imply that usefulness governed belief: people were willing to believe what they found useful; willing to welcome a model that would reinforce behavior they already valued. This has a particular importance in relation to miracles, which would, in this view, be less a symptom of superstition and more a measure of the lengths to which people would go in order to ratify patterns of leadership and authority they found acceptable on other grounds. The alternative notion—that they began to value certain types of behavior because the portrayed authority of models forced them to a certain level of belief—is less in tune with our own experience of hero-worship and propaganda.<sup>30</sup>

#### ENDURING MODELS AND VIRTUES

When discussing an author's purpose or an audience's expectations, we are dealing in part with the group of values that biography and panegyric were designed to recommend. There had been ideal heroes in more ancient times, a broadly shared view of virtue and morality, conventional interpretations of ambition and public service. An individual text—Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, the *Life of Antony*—might select and adapt, omitting some features and shifting the emphasis on others; but a heritage of literary habit imposed a fair degree of restriction. It is unwise, however, to rest content with types enshrined in, say, Pliny the Younger's panegyric on the emperor Trajan, or the portraits provided by Theopompus and Plutarch. The real issue in re-

29. The "literature of repentance"—anecdotes about sinful or lethargic ascetics, and about the corresponding tolerance of the virtuous—seems, on the face of it, more "realistic."

30. Antony's discussion with the "philosophers" shows that an understanding of this economy of credence could mark the surface of the texts themselves. Antony (like the Pachomians in the comparable account) had already been recognized as a figure of note; and his own definition of *logos* (including belief in wonders) simply identified the better grounds upon which others should accept his authority. See VA 73 f. and the discussion by Rousseau in chapter 4 below.

lation to any one text is always a second set of considerations—what has been heightened and what has been ignored. Here the demands of circumstance make themselves more evident—Porphyry's bid to capture from Iamblichus the authority to interpret the significance of Plotinus, for example, or the need to harness the reputation of an obscure and perhaps otherwise unimportant eccentric like Antony to an Alexandrian and episcopal concern with orthodoxy and clerical interest.<sup>31</sup>

Such considerations compel us to complicate further our assessment of a hero's role. Having acknowledged the immediate influence of both audience and author, we have to bear in mind the writer's need of a figure to portray. Recurrent topoi are made possible only when a tradition has been set in train; and one has to ask how steadily this or that genre might have evolved had it not been for the existence of "great" figures to set the ball rolling in the first place—Socrates, Alexander, Jesus. Moreover, deflecting the flow of reference—the process of selecting and adapting already referred to—depended on the intrusion or availability of new models, perhaps genuinely innovative in themselves, or at least seized upon by the champions of innovation—Plotinus, Constantine, Antony. In other words, we should not allow ourselves to be depressed or misled by the apparently repetitious conformity of our writers, but recognize more the dynamism that made for change at the heart of most literary traditions—within which true art resided in making new points without seeming to do so.<sup>32</sup>

When we catalogue the values that the texts discussed here were designed, as it seems, to uphold, encourage, or encapsulate, we find ourselves dealing chiefly with notions like "man of god" and "philosopher," as well as "emperor." This is where the analyses of Mark Edwards and Gillian Clark acquire their greatest significance. We have to recognize that the quality "Christian" (as in "Christian man of god," "Christian philosopher") is problematic: what it may add or subtract, what shift in the tradition it may represent, cannot be taken for granted. The very appropriation of such labels (if appropriation is the right word) signals a valued durability in the roles, as well as a more recent desire to redefine them. Several of our contributors hint

31. See Blumenthal and Clark, eds., *Divine Iamblichus*; Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*; and Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*.

32. See Clover and Humphreys, eds., *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*; and Roberts, *Jeweled Style*.

at the ways in which pagans and Christians argued with one another within these texts; and that dialogue was made possible only because the figures and ideals represented, not just a common vocabulary, but also shared beliefs and ambitions. Cultural expectations in this transitional period were like the smooth boards of a dance floor, across which partners could glide from one configuration to another. Concentrating too much on traditional definitions of "virtue" or "skill," *aretē* and *technē*, would be to ignore more particular disagreements: the way in which a holy man's example, rather than his verbal prescription, might be treated as the hallmark of his leadership; the exaltation of military prowess in an emperor at the expense of his philanthropy.<sup>33</sup>

We have to consider also the issue of *imitatio*, especially given the potentially different "placing" of subject and audience. For all their attachment to traditional morality, how many of these texts were expected to generate reproductions of their heroes? Is it immediately obvious or credible that the authors of the *Life of Antony* or the *Life of Rabbula* wished to promote the growth of more Antonys and Rabbulas? If the answer is no, it gives us further pause for thought as to what heroes were for, and what texts were designed to achieve.

#### NEW CHAMPIONS OF "HOLINESS"?

When we tackle more specifically the problem of "Christianization" in these texts, we seem to be faced with a development of the notion "holy." Something akin to holiness operated within the pagan sphere, certainly—the sphere of the *theios aner*.<sup>34</sup> Scholarly discourse on the survival of this concept, reaching back as it does to Homer himself, is familiar enough; but we cannot be blind to the major novelties that Christian (not to mention Jewish) tradition injected into this affirmation of a link with the divine. Notions of freedom and responsibility, and of inspiration and incarnation, made a marked alteration of perspective inevitable. As portrayed, Constantine and Antony simply operated, as human beings, differently from Trajan and Plotinus, and

33. For example preferred to instruction, see *Apophthegmata patrum*, Poemen 174. Themistius, in an age of military danger, was skillful at managing the balance: see Vanderspoel, *Themistius and the Imperial Court*.

34. The classic exposition—Bieler, *Theios Aner*—is still inspiring. Apollonius of Tyana came to be a representative figure: see Dzielska, *Apollonius*, and Anderson, *Philostratus*.

within a cosmos differently conceived. No Christian biographer or panegyrist could entirely escape the apostle Paul's evocation of the "new man"—especially since the idea was linked with "putting off mortality and putting on immortality." The shift in emphasis worked, therefore, from the inside outwards: differences in behavior or in moral recommendation flowed from a more deeply seated understanding of what it meant to be a creature, made in God's image, and destined for paradise, with all that that implied about human capabilities and aspirations.<sup>35</sup>

Even more arresting is the question of whether this new image of humanity reflected the presence of "new men" on the ground. Had the hallowed *parrhēsia* of the classical world, the freedom to speak, been commandeered by social groups previously condemned to silence—social groups that aped the articulate and powerful of an older system, but in the cause of destroying what the older system stood for? When one makes explicit the alternative possibility—that existing cadres of privilege had begun to express themselves in different ways (this being, therefore, one of the things that "Christianization" might have meant)—the complexity of the issue immediately becomes more apparent.<sup>36</sup>

There is a broad field of historical debate that addresses the relations between provincial élites and imperial systems and ideologies, between center and periphery; but more is being claimed here, namely, that within the provinces themselves, new channels of influence and models of authority were being set in place, heralding a subversion of existing hierarchies, a shift in the balance between religious and civic identities, and between city and countryside, townsman and peasant—indeed, between men and women.<sup>37</sup> Signs of such change can be detected in the texts examined here; and the impression might have been strengthened if there had been more reflection on such later texts as Palladius's *Lausiaca History* or the *Historia religiosa* of Theodoret of Cyrrhus—further sets of multiple portraits like

35. The theme of likeness to God is central to Cappadocian spirituality: see Meredith, *Cappadocians*; Kees, *Lehre von der Oikonomia Gottes*; and Merki, 'Ομοίωσις Θεῷ.

36. See Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, 4, and Heather, "New Men for New Constantines?"

37. We still owe so much to Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*. In addition to more recent studies of particular cities—Ephesus and Sardis, for example—see Humphrey, ed., *Roman and Byzantine Near East*; and more particularly on Syria, as a sequel to Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du nord*, see Tate, *Campagnes de la Syrie du nord du II<sup>e</sup> au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle*.

those examined by Patricia Cox Miller. Palladius and Theodoret present and represent new profiles of both capital and province, of Christian Constantinople and the turbulent religiosity of the Egyptian and Syrian countryside.<sup>38</sup>

#### LANGUAGE AND ITS PUBLIC

Palladius and Theodoret both wrote in Greek; and the way they used that language may readily be taken as a symptom of both provincial disquiet and social upheaval. Glen Bowersock, however, devotes his paper specifically to a Syriac text, and we make several references elsewhere to Syriac and other tongues. It is not easy to formulate precisely the questions prompted by this proliferation of languages. Greek provided the models—for biography, the tradition inspired by Plutarch; for panegyric, the example of Isocrates and the principles of Menander Rhetor. There was a range of associated Greek genres, especially the novel and the funeral *consolatio*. Even Latin, the language of imperial hegemony, was in many other respects dependent on Greek inspiration. However, it has been too easily assumed that this Hellenist tradition represented some high culture wholly distinct from the rougher experiments of more demotic (and ethnically marginalized) sectors of provincial life. Recent research into what we still tend to call "Near Eastern" cultures has revealed a broader and more complex "debatable land," largely but not wholly Semitic, between Yemen and the Caucasus.<sup>39</sup> The increasing presence of this culture outside biblical or talmudic literature does not represent a *democratizzazione*, to use the paradigm made familiar by Santo Mazzarino, but rather a blurring of earlier distinctions that had been artificially sharpened by the rivalry between Rome and Persia.<sup>40</sup>

38. Neither figure has attracted as full a study as he deserves. For Palladius, see Molinier, *Ascèse*; and Hunt, "Palladius of Helenopolis" is still helpful, together with the extended treatment in Clark, *Origenist Controversy*. Theodoret is even more inviting and, as a complex figure, neglected: see Leppin, *Von Constantin dem Grossen zu Theodosius II*, on his status as an historian, and Guinot, *L'Exégèse de Théodoret*, on his exegesis.

39. For general stimulation, see Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*. On Ephrem, who marks a Syrian turning-point, see Vööbus, *Literary, Critical, and Historical Studies*, and Brock, *Luminous Eye*. Detail is provided in, e.g., Brown, "Town, Village and Holy Man," and Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*. See also n. 37 above.

40. For a general statement of his views, see Mazzarino, *Fine del mondo antico*. On the cultural and diplomatic traffic on Rome's eastern frontier, see Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, and Lee, *Information and Frontiers*.



## THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

Perhaps, finally, we should look beyond even those possible shifts in social or geopolitical identity. Biography and panegyric dealt, certainly, with issues of morality and imitation; but, in certain forms, they also represented an attitude to death, or more precisely to the appropriate relationship between the dead and the living. It stands to reason that a change in the understanding of death would be reflected in texts that celebrated the dead. Elements of technical conceit and even of fiction were endemic within associated genres, and can be found in new guises in, say, Jerome's biographies (of Malchus and Hilarion especially) and in the travelogue of the *Historia monachorum*—not to mention the miracle stories of later hagiography. But the Christian understanding of death set its own stamp on the portraits of those who had safely weathered the transition and who might still influence the chances of those who had yet to make it.<sup>41</sup>

For this reason, the assurance of a paradise both gained and attainable, the presentation of models of moral discipline and vigor, and the promise of patronal aid all made the praise of the dead, in one form or another, central to the new Christian self-confidence. Of course, it is striking that ancient forms had so much to offer in constructing these images. Yet there was a new tone of familiarity, affection, and comradeship in the Christian material, a *communio sanctorum*, that tempered the respect and dignity, and also the remoteness, of the older portraits. To sustain this imagined intimacy with those who had gone before, it was necessary—in contrast to the voyeuristic denigrations characteristic of our own biographical tastes—to emphasize success and enduring influence, to create an almost tangible presence, which immediately expanded the social horizons of readers, empowering them to build within the orbit of their own experience the transcendent architecture of the city of God.

41. There has been surprisingly little attention paid to personal relationships with the dead, whether characterized as patronage or as affection and loyalty. See Lavagne, "Tombeau, mémoire du mort," and Ducot, "Tombeau, *locus religiosus*" (both sensitive to the element of private and intimate recollection), and Moreschini, "Meditatio mortis" (among several helpful essays in the same collection).

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## 1

## Philosophic Lives and the Philosophic Life

*Porphyry and Iamblichus*

GILLIAN CLARK

How should a philosopher live? Part of the answer to this question is how philosophers have lived; and in the late third and early fourth centuries, two Platonist philosophers, Porphyry and Iamblichus, made use of the biographical approach to the philosophic life. Porphyry's treatise *On Abstinence* portrays the ideal philosopher, who is detached from worldly concerns about politics and property, and who lives so as to minimize bodily desires and to encourage the ascent of reason toward God.<sup>1</sup> This philosopher is more isolated and more austere than either Pythagoras or Plotinus, whose lives Porphyry and Iamblichus describe in texts that are usually read as biographies. Each is credited with a *Life of Pythagoras*, and Porphyry also with a *Life of Plotinus*. These three works do indeed provide the narrative of a philosopher's life, but in each case the conventional title is misleading.<sup>2</sup> None of them is a freestanding biography, and each was written as part of a larger project. Nevertheless, they are often studied as examples of late antique biography, and they are most often read in relation to Christian texts, whether as a response to Christian challenge or as models of holiness that Christians sought to rival.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter attempts a double shift of focus. One shift is from life to lifestyle: from the remarkable individual βίος of the late antique

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2. Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras* (*Vita Pythagorae* = *VPyt*) and *Life of Plotinus* (*Vita Plotini* = *VP*); Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean (Way of) Life* (*De vita Pythagorica* = *DVPyt*).

3. For an especially perceptive study, see Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*.

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holy man, the charismatic and wonder-working philosopher, to the philosopher as a teacher among his students, inspiring and promoting a philosophic βίος for which his own life is one kind of protreptic. The other is from debate across the boundary between pagan and Christian to internal Neoplatonist debate about the relationship of human beings to God, and therefore about the way they should live. (The term *pagan* began as Christian disparagement: it is used here because Porphyry would not have cared for the polite modern alternatives. *Polytheist* misdescribes his theology, and *Hellene* imports a fourth-century cultural agenda. Porphyry held that within all cultures a common truth was taught.<sup>4</sup>)

Both of these shifts require awareness of time. Porphyry and Iamblichus were at work in the period when, from a triumphalist Christian perspective, the most important trend was the increasing visibility and social acceptance of Christianity in the late third century; and the most important events were persecution under Diocletian, transformation under Constantine, and then, in 325, the council at Nicaea, the first (supposedly) ecumenical council convened by the first openly Christian emperor. Porphyry, born in 234, went to work with Plotinus in 263, and according to the *Suda* (s.v. Πορφύριος, IV p. 178 Adler), he was still alive in the reign of Diocletian forty years later. Iamblichus, born probably in the 240s, was dead by 326.<sup>5</sup> In hindsight, they can be seen as leaders of pagan resistance to the growing strength of Christianity. For fourth-century Christians, Porphyry was the archetypal hostile philosopher, and his books were denounced by a series of Christian apologists and publicly burned by order of a Christian emperor. For fourth-century pagans, Iamblichus was the inspiration for the emperor Julian's attempt to revive and reform traditional religion.<sup>6</sup> Porphyry and Iamblichus are, indeed, still used as resources in debate, not only between Christians and latter-day pagans, but between those who approach philosophy

and religion as intellectuals and those who are also mystics and sacramentalists.

Present-day historians have learned to be cautious about the irresistible rise of Christianity as presented by Eusebius and his successors. We also need to be cautious about any assumption that non-Christian philosophers formed a solid anti-Christian front. The pagan past, like the Christian past, could be canonized and simplified. In the 390s, Eunapius was able to depict a serene philosophic succession from Plotinus to Porphyry, to Iamblichus, and to the students of Iamblichus; but three generations before Eunapius, philosophers competed for status and were preoccupied not with Christianity but with their own fundamental disagreements.<sup>7</sup> Porphyry and Iamblichus were not single-issue philosophers. They debated the central questions of Platonist philosophy: the relationship of the human soul, and of the material world, to the gods, and the expression and restoration of that relationship in philosophic and religious practice. Their rivalry was overt when Porphyry wrote a *Letter to Anebo*, an (imagined) Egyptian priest, confronting this representative of the oldest religious tradition with difficulties about the worship of the gods. Iamblichus replied, in the work known since Marsilio Ficino as *On the Mysteries of Egypt*, in the persona of the Egyptian master Abammon enlightening his disciple on the true meaning of religious practice. The debate between Porphyry and Iamblichus on the philosophic life was less openly confrontational than their debate on religion, but their conclusions on how to live differed just as radically. These conclusions were supported by argument from example, in the form of philosophic biography.

#### PYTHAGOREAN LIVES

Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras*, which manuscripts and printed texts present as a separate biography, is an excerpt from the first book of a four-book *Philosophic History*. The *History* extended from Homer to Plato and, according to the fifth-century bishop Theodoret, combined

4. See G. Clark, "Translate into Greek: Porphyry of Tyre and the New Barbarians."

5. See Smith, "Porphyrian Studies since 1913," 719–22, and Dillon, "Iamblichus of Chalcis," 865–66.

6. On book-burning, see Barnes, "Scholarship or Propaganda?" 53; for Christian refutations, see Simmons, *Arnobius of Sicca*, 221; on Iamblichus, see Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism*, 7–8, 188.

7. On Eusebius: Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 87–95. Eunapius canon: Miller, "Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography," chapter 10 in this volume; Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 35; Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man," 33–8.

biography with doxography. In the life of Pythagoras, doxography occupies much less space than biography, but the balance may have shifted in other lives. Almost nothing else survives from books 1 and 2, although they included Empedocles, a philosopher important to Porphyry. The fragments of book 3 are passages chosen by Theodoret to discredit Socrates, whereas the fragments on Plato, from book 4, were chosen by Cyril of Alexandria to show how close Platonism is to Christianity. Both these Christian authors were evidently pleased to make Porphyry, the notorious anti-Christian, supply them with ammunition.

The *Philosophic History* thus exemplifies some general problems with Porphyry's work. Most of his writings survive only through the quite different use that someone else chose to make of his material. Important texts are incomplete: the concluding sections of the *Life of Pythagoras* are missing, and so are those of *On Abstinence* and *To Marcella*. There is no secure chronology, for the only fixed date (301) is that given by Porphyry himself to the *Life of Plotinus*. Some texts can be related to Porphyry's years with Plotinus (263–68): *On Abstinence* is addressed to a fellow student, and *To Marcella* was written after Porphyry's marriage to the widow of another. But there is not even that much indication for the *Philosophic History*. We do not know when or why Porphyry wrote it, whether it gave Pythagoras a special status among philosophers, and whether the effect was more like Diogenes Laertius, providing material that every student should know, or like Eunapius, establishing a tradition. In particular, we do not know how Plato was presented in relation to Pythagoras: successor, rival, superior, or one more in the chorus of philosophers.

The survival of the life of Pythagoras, as a separate text, suggests that the rest of the *History* mattered less; but that does not mean it mattered less to Porphyry. Pythagoras was a glamorous character, and Porphyry did a thorough job of collecting exotic source material, so excerptors were naturally interested. It is all too easy for present-day scholars to follow their example and give Pythagoras more than his fair share of attention. Pythagoras was not only exotic, he was the obvious pagan rival to Christ. He was the son of a god, credited with miracles and with supernatural discernment, and a divine teacher who reinterpreted traditional wisdom for his disciples. Pythagoreans had a commitment to the Master and his teachings, acknowledged bonds of friendship across the known world, and followed a distinct-

tive rule of life, sometimes (according to tradition) in communities. All these offered parallels to the Christian churches and to Christian asceticism and monasticism. Pythagoras could claim greater antiquity than Jesus, and his teachings were said to be profound and universal, incorporating the wisdom of many more traditions than Judaism. If Porphyry was consistently and primarily an enemy of Christianity, as Christians from Eusebius on believed him to be, he would have had good reason to promote Pythagoras.

But Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras*, as it now survives, does not suggest any special commitment to Pythagoras, his teachings and his way of life, whether as rival to Christ or as rival to Plato: it reads like a useful collection of material from a wide range of sources.<sup>8</sup> Nor does Porphyry exploit the possible connections between his own life story and that of Pythagoras, who was also Tyrian (in some stories) by birth or education, was taught by Phoenicians and Greeks, and made a journey to Italy, where he was an influential teacher. Perhaps the *History* as a whole was an early work, a scholarly survey produced while Longinus was still the major influence on Porphyry.<sup>9</sup>

Iamblichus, in contrast, clearly did take Pythagoras as exemplifying the philosophic life. Like Porphyry, he provides a narrative of the life of Pythagoras that is not a freestanding biography; unlike Porphyry, he makes his purpose plain. The traditional title *De vita Pythagorica*, which used to be translated as *Life of Pythagoras*, means rather (in the words of two recent English translations) *On the Pythagorean Life* or *On the Pythagorean Way of Life*. The book is the first in a sequence of (probably) ten Pythagorean texts put together by Iamblichus, and it encourages students to embark on this demanding program of study by offering, not just the remarkable βίος, the life, of Pythagoras, but the Pythagorean βίος, or way of life, devised and inspired by the ideal philosopher himself.<sup>10</sup> No student of philosophy could hope to be like Pythagoras, who was in a class of his own. "They have a saying 'Humans are bipeds, and birds, and a third besides,' and the third is Pythagoras" (*DVPyt* 28.144). But the aspiring

8. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 26; but cf. Dillon and Hershbell, *Iamblichus*, 14; Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man," 37.

9. Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre*, 34, challenged by Segonds, *VPyt*, 190–92 (but see Barnes, "Scholarship or Propaganda?" 55–57, and Croke, "Porphyry's Anti-Christian Chronology," 168–85, on Porphyry's supposed *Chronicle*).

10. Translations by Clark and by Dillon and Hershbell; Pythagorean sequence, O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 32–40.

student could find in the calm and ordered community of Pythagoreans a powerful image of himself (or, unusually, herself) as philosopher, committed and serene in spotless white, sharing a lifestyle with supportive companions.

In *On the Mysteries*, Iamblichus openly responded to Porphyry so as to show him how he should have approached problems of religion. In *On the Pythagorean Life*, he showed how to use the life of a chosen philosopher as protreptic for philosophy: that is, for the intensive study of philosophic texts and for the appropriate lifestyle. If this too is a corrective response, which works of Porphyry's had Iamblichus encountered when he wrote *On the Pythagorean Life*? There is no secure chronology of Iamblichus's life or writings, so argument depends on the texts. The parallels between the two narratives of Pythagoras's life are so close that Iamblichus must have used either the material collected by Porphyry or the same sources. But he used this material in a context suggesting that *On the Pythagorean Life* (whatever its date) is most helpfully read in relation to the *Life of Plotinus*, and also in relation to *On Abstinence*.

The life of Plotinus that Porphyry published in 301, thirty years after Plotinus's death, is also not a freestanding biography. The text is not found independently of the *Enneads*, Porphyry's edition of the writings of Plotinus, and its full title is *On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Writings*. It is the preface to the *Enneads*, just as *On the Pythagorean Life* is the preface to the Pythagorean collection edited by Iamblichus. It, too, is protreptic for the study of the difficult material it introduces, and it deploys the life of the author and the philosophic life of his students to show why the material is worth the effort. Both prefaces suggest that the author of the works they introduce was in some sense divine. Iamblichus presents Pythagoras as a soul close to the gods, sent from heaven to assist humans, or actually a god himself (*DVPyt* 8; 135); Porphyry presents Plotinus as a soul whose divine guardian is not a lesser daemon but a divinity (*VP* 10).

Pythagoras and Plotinus were far apart in time, but Porphyry and Iamblichus faced similar problems. If there were any authentic writings by Pythagoras and his followers (and that was very doubtful), they were deliberately obscure. Plotinus had left writings, but they were difficult and tentative explorations of philosophical problems, not the exposition of a system. So there was work to be done before students could even have texts to study. Worse, there was doubt, not

just about the divinity, but about the intellectual credentials of the authors. Hostile reactions to Pythagoras began with Heraclitus; Pythagorean writings, beset by charges of forgery, were dismissed as pretentious nonsense, and Pythagoreans were often regarded as cranks. Plotinus had been accused of plagiarism and incoherence (*VP* 18.1–8), and his way of living and teaching might well seem unhelpful, if not actually damaging, to himself and to emotionally vulnerable students such as Porphyry (*VP* 11, 15). Twentieth-century reactions to the life and work of Wittgenstein are an obvious parallel.

The problems were similar, but the solutions differ, because Porphyry's own testimony is central to the life of Plotinus. In it, complaints are voiced and sometimes answered, and the editor of Plotinus's writings, the "I, Porphyry" who recurs to unintentionally comic effect, is shown to be exceptionally well qualified for his task. He also explains (*VP* 24–26) exactly what he has done to organize his texts. Iamblichus provides, although with characteristic repetition and unclarity, the material for answering the charges against Pythagoras. His editorial voice remains almost unheard, and there is no surviving explanation of how he chose and arranged his Pythagorean sequence.<sup>11</sup>

So the life of Plotinus and *On the Pythagorean Life* are both designed to introduce a sequence of texts and encourage the reader to study them; both affirm the special status of the author and acknowledge, but try to overcome, the controversy that surrounds him. They are in parallel, and they are also in dialogue (even if we cannot be sure who spoke first). There is a further resemblance in that they both appropriate Pythagoras to support different varieties of Platonist philosophy and lifestyle. This is obvious for Iamblichus, less so for Porphyry: but both *On Abstinence* and the new edition of Plotinus, unlike Porphyry's life of Pythagoras, at once invite the reader to recognize Pythagorean influence.

The full title of *On Abstinence* is *On Abstinence from the Ensouled*, that is from eating once-animate foods. The treatise begins by reproaching Castricius, another student of Plotinus's, for reverting to flesh foods and abandoning the principles of Pythagoras and Empedocles (*Abst.* 1.3.3). The arrangement of Plotinus's writings in *Enneads* ("ninefolds") is also a signal. They were so called because Porphyry

11. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 30–83 (survey 87–91).

had, at some cost in dividing up treatises, reorganized the writings of Plotinus into six groups of nine (three nines in the first volume, two in the second, one in the third). Similarly, Iamblichus selected a canon of Platonic dialogues arranged as a decad (which contains all numbers), followed by a second sequence of one and two (which together produce all numbers).<sup>12</sup> Porphyry does not explicitly justify his choice of significant Pythagorean numbers to order the writings of Plotinus, but in the life of Plotinus, he cites another preface, that of Longinus *On the End*. This work was a response to Plotinus and his student Amelius, in which Longinus said that Plotinus "expounded Pythagorean and Platonic principles more clearly than anyone before him" (VP 20.71–74). Porphyry, concerned to show that Plotinus was not derivative, restates this as "Plotinus and Amelius . . . were so far from plagiarizing from Numenius and giving his views the first place in their system that Plotinus deliberately propounded Pythagorean views" (21.6).<sup>13</sup>

As in case of the *Philosophic History*, it would be easy to overstate the importance of Pythagoras. To propound Pythagorean views, or adopt Pythagorean practices, was not an alternative to being Platonist: depending on one's position in a long-running debate, Pythagoreanism was Platonism properly interpreted or Platonism with optional extras.<sup>14</sup> This applies to philosophic lifestyle as well as philosophic theory. Pythagoreanism implied an ascetic lifestyle, but an ascetic philosopher was not necessarily Pythagorean. Plato argued for minimizing attention to the body, because bodily desires distract the soul, and that required some form of spiritual training, ἄσκησις. Avoidance of luxury and sexual indulgence, regulation of food and drink and sleep, were to be expected in any committed philosopher. According to Greco-Roman popular assumptions, vegetarians were usually Pythagoreans, but Porphyry demonstrated in *On Abstinence* that there were many arguments for vegetarianism. Pythagoreans (and Empedocles) argued that rational human souls could be reincarnated in animal bodies; other philosophers disagreed, but were impressed

12. Iamblichus: O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 97. *Enneads*: Saffrey, "Pourquoi Porphyre a-t-il édité Plotin?" 47.

13. Numenius: O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 10–14, and 29 on Pythagorean traits in VP; see also Gatti, "Plotinus," 12–13.

14. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, esp. 9–29; Dillon, "'Orthodoxy' and 'Eclecticism,'" 119–25; cf. Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man," 36–37.

by the evidence for thought and emotion in animals, or avoided meat because it was expensive and stimulating.

Pythagoras, then, did not displace Plato, though there were differences of opinion about their relative importance. Iamblichus intended his students to read his syllabus of Platonic dialogues in the light of his Pythagorean collection. His *Protreptic*, next in sequence to *On the Pythagorean Life*, combines general and Pythagorean philosophy, and progresses through Plato and Aristotle to Pythagorean precepts.<sup>15</sup> Porphyry has some Pythagorean allusions and subtexts in *On Abstinence*, but makes only occasional mention of Pythagoreans and their principles.<sup>16</sup> This is unexpected, because they would seem to be ideal for a treatise concerned with animals, justice, sacrifice appropriate to the gods, and ascetic communities. Maybe Porphyry observed Pythagorean reticence, once his opening comments had alerted those who knew. But to describe the true philosopher of *On Abstinence*, he borrows (*Abst.* 1.36.3–4) from Plato's *Theaetetus*.

Plotinus, as depicted by Porphyry in the *Life*, has some characteristics that Pythagoreans would have approved. He would not take the wonder drug theriac, which had animal ingredients, or attend the public baths (VP 2.3–7); and he was very reluctant to reveal the teachings of his teacher Ammonius and to commit his own to writing (3.24–27). But he overcame this reluctance (which could also have been inspired by Plato, *Epist.* 7.341), and when he did agree to write, it was not in the obscurely dogmatic Pythagorean mode. Plotinus wrote in an exploratory, unsystematic form, following argument and counterargument as in a Platonic dialogue without the interjections.<sup>17</sup> He kept the birthdays of Socrates and Plato (VP 2.40–42). He wanted to withdraw from Rome to a ruined city in Campania (12.4): this was an area with strong Pythagorean associations, but Plotinus would have named the city Platonopolis and given it the laws of Plato. Most important of all, the students of Plotinus are Platonic (or rather Socratic) students, quite unlike those of Pythagoras as represented by Iamblichus. The relationship of a philosopher to his students, and how those students should be taught to live, was a primary concern of Porphyry and Iamblichus in writing philosophic biography.

15. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 40–44; 97–98.

16. *Abst.* 1.36, ed. Bouffartigue-Patillon.

17. See O'Brien, "Plotin et le voeu de silence," and Goulet-Cazé, "Arrière-plan scolaire de la Vie de Plotin," 249–56.



## TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

According to Iamblichus, the students of Pythagoras were accepted only after he had tested their suitability. They joined a community that followed a rule of life, but there was a period of probation before they were allowed to speak or to hear the Master. According to Porphyry, the students of Plotinus came to hear him if and when they chose, intervened in the discussion when they had something to say or to ask, and decided for themselves whether, and how far, they would follow his example of ascetic living. Porphyry does not explicitly make the comparison with the students of Socrates, but he recreates, in the life of Plotinus, a self-selected group of students who vary in age, expertise, commitment, and way of life.<sup>18</sup>

The students of Plotinus include examples of the traditional three ways of life: contemplation, politics, and business. Porphyry disapproves of the rhetor Serapion (7.46–49), who could not bring himself to abandon moneylending. Plotinus himself had no known family ties, property, or continuing connection with his home town, but most of his students did, and some continued to engage in politics or even to serve as senators. The senator Rogatianus (7.32–46) was exceptional in refusing to take office as praetor. Porphyry says that anyone who wished could attend the seminar, but there must in practice have been financial and social barriers. Most students of philosophy relied on private funds to give them the necessary leisure. Plotinus also had important friends; a letter of introduction, or a friend to take one in, as Amelius took in the painter Carterius (1.11–14), would surely be needed to get past the porter of the lady Gemina, widow (perhaps) of an emperor, in whose house Plotinus lived (9.1–2).<sup>19</sup>

The group fragmented when Plotinus was terminally ill. He had no designated successor, and the program of study had depended on him.<sup>20</sup> Porphyry refers to lectures by Plotinus and to discussions and exegesis of texts that Plotinus had chosen. A student might volunteer a paper, or Plotinus might ask him to defend a thesis or report on a text, but teaching and discussion were shaped by Plotinus's willing-

18. Discussion in Goulet-Cazé, "Arrière-plan scolaire," 231–57; Lim, *Public Disputation, Power and Social Order in Late Antiquity*, 37–47, and id. "Auditor Thaumasius in the *Vita Plotini*," 157–60.

19. Saffrey, "Pourquoi Porphyre a-t-il édité Plotin?" 32.

20. Further examples in Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 189–90.

ness to pursue whatever question was raised, and the only evidence of progress was Plotinus's approval. This tutorial method never suits all students, and Porphyry notes frustration with the lack of system. Thaumasius (13.12–15) wanted Plotinus to lecture without constant interruptions. Amelius, after eighteen years with Plotinus, had written nothing (4.5) and said that there was disorganized and irrelevant talking (4.35–38). He joined Porphyry in urging Plotinus to write (5.7), but it was Porphyry who eventually organized the piecemeal writings of Plotinus into a thematic sequence.

Some people complained about the content as much as the technique. They said that Plotinus talked a lot of derivative nonsense, and Porphyry's own first reaction was that Plotinus's teaching depended on a fundamental mistake (18.1–11). He wrote a paper arguing that there are objects of thought distinct from acts of thought: Plotinus would then be wrong to suppose that we discover what we truly are by investigating our own acts of thought. Does such dissatisfaction, rather than Pythagorean silence, explain why *On Abstinence* makes no mention of Plotinus, the revered vegetarian teacher of Porphyry and Castricius? But thirty years after Plotinus died, Porphyry could still remember signs of acceptance or interest from Plotinus.

Iamblichus worked with Porphyry either as student or as fellow student. We do not know about his experience as a student, but Eunapius (458–60) has stories of Iamblichus the teacher. In contrast, we have Porphyry's own account of life as a student of Plotinus's, but Eunapius (456–57) knew very little about Porphyry as teacher. (This may be because Porphyry taught in Rome, and Eunapius's connections were in the eastern Mediterranean.) Iamblichus made sure that his students had a curriculum and a structure that did not depend on his presence; he also wrote commentaries on most of the Platonic dialogues in his canon.<sup>21</sup>

*On the Pythagorean Life* is located in an idealized past, when aspirant philosophers could be put on probation for three years and required to maintain silence for five (DVPyt 17.71–72). But the structured and hierarchical lifestyle it advocates could easily be adapted for philosophers from the social elite of late antique cities, like the students Iamblichus taught when he returned to his Syrian homeland.<sup>22</sup>

21. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 91–105; Dillon, "Iamblichus of Chalcis," 875–78.

22. Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man," 40–43.

He envisages (21.96–100) communities of philosophers living in quiet places outside cities, perhaps near sanctuaries. They spend part of each day in solitary study and reflection, but they also have small-group discussions, help each other with advice, and relax and exercise together. Their philosophic lifestyle avoids luxury but is not unduly austere. Both sexes are expected to be chaste within marriage, but celibacy is not required; there are regulations about food, but wine and some kinds of meat are available at dinner; purity rules ensure that the philosopher is ready at any time to offer sacrifice to the gods. The lifestyle is compatible with the civic duties undertaken (but only after lunch) by some members of the group, and with traditional sacrificial ritual.

This is quite different from the diversity and individualism portrayed in the *Life of Plotinus*, and also from the solitary austerity of *On Abstinence*. Plotinus is absent from *On Abstinence*, and his students are present only in the opening paragraphs, as relays of visitors bringing news of Castricius's lapse. In this text the true philosopher is a priest, working to approach God "alone to the alone" (2.49.1). He lives as befits one in close contact with the divine (1.36–38), but not like the Pythagoreans of Iamblichus, who are always fit to offer sacrifice. He rejects civic concerns and traditional sacrificial ritual; he eats no flesh foods and would prefer not to eat at all (1.45.3); he "does not stoop to marriage" (1.52.2) and appears to live in solitude, conversing only through the texts he reads and writes. When Porphyry collects examples of ascetic communities in different traditions, what interests him is not their mutual support, but the lifestyle that maintains their purity and separates them from household and civic commitments. Brahmins, indeed, do not even live or talk together, and if they are forced into social contact, they recover by voluntary solitude and fasting (4.17.6).

*On Abstinence* is an extreme, sometimes an obsessive, text. Its insistence on purity and discipline, and its concern with contamination by what goes into the body, suggest the suicidal depression that afflicted Porphyry in the late 260s (*VP* 11), which may have been intensified by Plotinus's death and the dispersal of his students. Porphyry says that the lifestyle it advocates is suited only to a few, even among philosophers (*Abst.* 1.27.1), and a "Plotinian" philosophic life could, on the evidence of Porphyry's own life of Plotinus, have been much more accommodating to human and social needs. It has to be

remembered that philosophers change their minds and try out different arguments in different contexts. In *On Abstinence*, Porphyry rejects traditional religious practice as unworthy of the gods (2.38–43), but he also points out that tradition allows simple offerings; and in *To Marcella* (18), he argues that "the greatest fruit of piety is to honor the divine according to ancestral custom, not because the divine needs anything, but because its most awesome and blessed majesty invites us to reverence."

The personal is also the philosophical: the philosophic lifestyles offered by Porphyry and Iamblichus mirror their own choices. Porphyry left his native city of Tyre to work first with Longinus in Athens, then with Plotinus in Rome. He married relatively late (*To Marcella* 1), in order to protect the widow and children of a fellow student, and without wishing for children of his own; this probably implies that he maintained celibacy. On the evidence, he chose philosophic detachment over the traditional obligation to maintain his family line and his city's political and religious life. Iamblichus traveled to study philosophy, but he returned to Syria, had children, and interpreted civic sacrificial religion as beneficial to worshippers.

But these choices were not only the product of personal temperament: they also reflect an important difference of belief about the relationship of the soul to the material world. The aim of the philosophic life was always to purify the soul and help it to rise by study and contemplation toward the divine. Porphyry held that the material world could only contaminate, and that the philosophic soul must seek to escape that contamination by maintaining its connection with the divine. Iamblichus, as his students would come to understand in their program of study, interpreted Platonism as teaching the presence of gods in the material world. It followed that the embodied soul must not seek only to escape, but must do its share in establishing order and harmony.<sup>23</sup>

#### PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS

Porphyry and Iamblichus differed on fundamental questions. Their use of biography at least reflects those differences, and was probably a weapon in their continuing debate. But they both saw themselves

23. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 1–17.

as Platonist philosophers, working for the understanding of a tradition common to the great Greek philosophers and to the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean. Did they think their tradition needed defense against Christianity?

Some Christians held that divine revelation had superseded the philosophy of Greece, others interpreted Christianity in Platonist terms, but all Christians acknowledged the supremacy of Christ and of the Bible as a divinely inspired text. Porphyry presents Plotinus, and Iamblichus presents Pythagoras, as exceptionally close to the divine. Their writings are inspired by their closeness to God, and study of these writings is itself a spiritual exercise, which, by increasing the student's understanding, helps the soul in its effort toward reunion with the divine. The *Enneads* and *On Pythagoreanism* are sacred texts.

Such a presentation of a great philosopher and his writings need not have been a reaction to Christian teaching: pagans and Christians agreed on the reverent study of central texts, but differed on what those central texts should be. Here, again, we must beware of hindsight. Porphyry is notorious for having written fifteen books against the Christians. Fragments of *Porphyry against the Christians* survive because Christians set out to refute them, but both the authenticity and the title of the fragments are disputed.<sup>24</sup> It is not clear either that Porphyry wrote a separate work with the title *Against the Christians* or that he was a lifelong campaigner against Christianity. What is clear is his lifelong disapproval of those who knew, but rejected, the common philosophic tradition.

As a young man, Porphyry met Origen, and Eusebius (*Historia Eccl.* 6.19.5) cites with indignation his comment that Origen was trained in Greek philosophy, including that of Plato and of eminent Pythagoreans, but lapsed into lawlessness (that is, into Christian refusal of social norms) and also used allegory inappropriately on the plain sense of Christian scripture.<sup>25</sup> Porphyry later encountered several varieties of Christians among the students of Plotinus (*VP* 16): those he regards as worthy of comment were (in his opinion) heretics

24. For Porphyry's supposed *Against the Christians*, see Harnack, challenged by Barnes, "Porphyry *Against the Christians*"; id., "Scholarship and Propaganda"; and Beatrice, "Towards a New Edition of Porphyry's Fragments *Against the Christians*." See also Simmons, *Arnobius*, 220–22.

25. Sellw, "Achilles or Christ?"

who claimed descent from ancient philosophy but said that Plato had not plumbed the depth of intelligible reality. This catchword recurs in *On Abstinence*, where one of Porphyry's targets is represented (1.42) as arguing that there is no need for self-restraint, because "depth" can absorb all impurities as the sea does. There is no mention of Christians in *On Abstinence*, although there are some images that Christians shared with Platonists.<sup>26</sup>

Plotinus, according to Porphyry, often challenged the heretics in his seminar, and he wrote a treatise against them to which Porphyry, when editing the *Enneads*, gave the title *Against the Gnostics* (*Enn.* 5.9). The favored students of Plotinus joined in the attack. Amelius wrote forty volumes on the book of Zostrianus, and Porphyry demonstrated that writings ascribed to Zoroaster could not be authentic, but must be a later forgery.<sup>27</sup> This scholarly task is relevant to Porphyry's famous comparison of the Gospel narratives and supposedly expert knowledge of Judaeo-Christian scripture; neither was difficult for the learned pupil of the great Longinus. Porphyry does not even mention, in the life of Plotinus, that he had also down-dated the book of Daniel, which was alleged to be ancient prophecy and was important to Christian claims of antiquity.<sup>28</sup> What stands out here is not a sustained attack on Christians, but a sustained defense of the antiquity and authority of Platonist philosophical tradition.

Porphyry's decision to reedit the works of Plotinus in 301, thirty years after Plotinus's death, may have been influenced by a perception of Christian success. Diocletian's campaign to restore traditional religion entailed repression of Christians, and Christians experienced it as targeted persecution. It is possible that Porphyry was one of Diocletian's intellectual advisers, although the arguments are tenuous.<sup>29</sup> Even if he was not, the campaign would provide a context for encouraging people to read Plotinus as "the philosopher of our time" (*VP* 1.1). Fifteen books against the Christians, whether they were a separate work or part of a defense of tradition, could be the other side

26. Igal, "Gnostics and the 'Ancient Philosophy' in Porphyry and Plotinus"; Tardieu, "Gnostiques dans la vie de Plotin"; Shaw, *Theurgy*, 10–12. Shared images in *Abst.* 1.37–41, ed. Bouffartigue-Patillon.

27. Zostrianus: Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 202–3.

28. Casey, "Porphyry and the Origin of the Book of Daniel."

29. Barnes, "Scholarship or Propaganda?"

of the coin. But this, like so much else in Porphyry's life and work, is speculation; all that is certain is that Christians from Eusebius on perceived Porphyry as their fiercest opponent.

It was different with Iamblichus. The emperor Julian apparently planned to use him as the theorist of a Hellenic revival, complete with vocational clergy, restored temple cult, religious instruction, and welfare funds.<sup>30</sup> Iamblichus was particularly suitable because he tried to integrate philosophy with traditional religious practice. But he had died at least thirty years before Julian's attempt to challenge the Christian Church, which by then had experienced almost fifty years of government support and subsidy. Welfare funds, in particular, were an imitation of Christian giving: Iamblichus emphasized the bonds of affection, *φιλία*, linking different levels of the universe, but is not known to have deduced any need to help the poor.

Iamblichus is also not known to have attacked Christianity, unless commitment to another philosophical and religious tradition may be taken as an implicit attack. He was not demonized, as Porphyry was, by Christian writers, and his extant works do not openly allude to Christianity. It remains possible that he was aware of the Christian Gospels when he wrote *On the Pythagorean Life* and intended to rival some of their claims about Christ.<sup>31</sup> But the parallels that can be drawn between Pythagoras and Christ, or between Pythagoreans and Christian ascetics, need not mean that an author who wrote about Pythagoras did so in order to challenge Christians.

Porphyry was, almost certainly, dead before Constantine's victory; Iamblichus lived for some years after it, but may not have been disturbed by the edict of toleration or by Constantine's subsidies to Christian churches. We do not know how visible the Christian presence was in the late third century, or how far Christians in Egypt or Syria had gone in developing their own variety of philosophic life, namely, the individual or communal practice of asceticism.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, we do not know whether Christianity presented a serious challenge to the authority, and claims to holiness, of pagan philosophical and religious tradition.

30. Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian*, 188.

31. Edwards, "Birth, Death, and Divinity in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* and Related Texts," chapter 2 in this volume; Dillon and Hershbelle, *Pythagorean Way of Life*, 25–26; more generally, Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, 121–43.

32. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 9–11; Rousseau, *Basil*, 70–82.

Once again, an awareness of time is required. The source material is such that pagan asceticism (actual or represented) of the late third century has to be compared with Christian asceticism (actual or represented) of the late fourth. The Christian texts have good reason to challenge, explicitly or tacitly, the pagan texts; but the converse need not be true. For example, there are probable allusions to Pythagoras in Athanasius's *Life of Antony*, which were probably intended to show that the uneducated Antony surpassed the great philosophers.<sup>33</sup> But the *Life of Antony* is thought to be a text of the mid fourth century, and is hence not a reliable source for Christian asceticism at the time of its dramatic date in the mid third century. Its allusions to Pythagoras cannot help us to understand the concerns of Porphyry and Iamblichus in the late third and early fourth centuries.

Sometimes what looks like an allusion to a rival actually reveals a shift in attitude and behavior. Iamblichus may not have been aware of any Christian monastic communities in the late third or early fourth centuries, but in *On the Pythagorean Life*, he uses two words that later became technical terms of Christian asceticism. Some Pythagoreans in the first Italian communities are said to be *κοινόβιοι* (DVPyt 6.29), that is, they lived a life in common. This means that they shared a lifestyle that allowed for family groups, and that their property was managed in common. It does not mean anything like Christian coenobite monasticism, which was single-sex and required renunciation of property. Other Pythagoreans, after the death of Pythagoras, lived solitary lives in deserted places, *μονάζοντες ἐν ταῖς ἐρημίαις* (DVPyt 35.253). Iamblichus has taken this phrase from Porphyry (VPyt 58) or from their common source, but it sounds like an allusion to desert-dwelling Christian solitaries. Athanasius, perhaps thirty years later, used *μονάζοντες* of Christian celibates who led an ascetic life, although still within the city.<sup>34</sup> But the Pythagoreans live in lonely, not in desert, places; and (more important) Iamblichus does not think it is good for them. They are *μονάζοντες*, living in solitude, because *μονοθέντες*, left alone and demoralized by the death of Pythagoras.

This example is interesting because it points to differences, not just between pagan and Christian, but between pagan and pagan. Those

33. Festugière, "Sur une nouvelle édition du *De vita Pythagorica* de Jamblique"; Meredith, "Asceticism—Christian and Greek."

34. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 9.

who engaged in ἄσκησις, spiritual training, had to make choices about holiness in relation to society. How far should they withdraw from the obligations of civic life and householding, and how much should they concede to the body's needs for food and rest, sex and company? Should they aim for serenity or for purity? Iamblichus accepted the traditional duties to family and city, and his imagined Pythagorean communities, although separate and rule-governed, allow for civic involvement. Plotinus, as described in Porphyry's *Life*, has no family, eats and sleeps very little, and disregards his health to the point of allowing a fatal illness to develop (VP 2).<sup>35</sup> But he is still a social being, who lives in the capital city among friends and students, knows important people, and acts as arbitrator in lawsuits and as trustee for orphans (9).

In *On Abstinence*, Porphyry advocates more radical choices for a minority among philosophers. His ideal philosopher (*Abst.* 1.36–38) does not even know where to find City Hall and lives in quiet places even if they are (like Plato's Academy) unhealthy. He does not deliberately damage his health, because illness is a distraction, but he has no need to be physically fit (1.27.1). Porphyry also rejects the standard Platonist argument that the philosopher may (and usually should) make a reasoned choice to procreate legitimate children so as to meet his obligations to family, city, and gods. Holy men, he says (4.20), have taught that purity is being unmixed with one's opposite and impurity is being mixed with it. Intercourse (μίξις) is the mixing of opposites: male and female, body and soul, life and death. If conception occurs, soul is contaminated by its association with body. If conception fails, the living body is contaminated by dead seed. Briefly (1.41.4), "everything is shameful in comparison with the life according to intellect, and one should abstain from everything just as from sex; though nature must be conceded some nourishment because of the necessity of generation."

Detailed study of philosophic lives brings out the variety of pagan asceticism, just as detailed study of Christian asceticism has brought out its diverse and experimental character.<sup>36</sup> There are still some general contrasts between the pagan asceticism of the third century and the Christian asceticism of the fourth. The role models of Christian

35. Plotinus on illness and death: S. R. L. Clark, "Plotinus," 289; Dillon, "Singing without an Instrument."

36. Elm, "Virgins of God"; Rousseau, *Basil*, 61–76, 190–210.

texts are faced with the same choices as the pagans, but their response is more extreme even than Porphyry's in *On Abstinence*. Withdrawal from civic preoccupations becomes renunciation of social and financial status. Commitment to the ascetic life is symbolized by changing one's clothes for the coarse, dark, probably dirty clothing of the "lower orders," the *humiles*. Quiet residence in one's own or someone else's house, preferably a country villa, becomes withdrawal into solitude, and the "lonely places," ἔρημα χωρία, sought by some philosophers become the desert, the ἔρημος, actual or self-created. Celibacy when it is appropriate, and rejection of sexual indulgence, becomes virginity for life and acute concern with any manifestations of sexual desire. Moderation in food, drink, and sleep becomes severe deprivation of all three; time given to philosophy becomes a marathon of prayer and Bible study; minimal attention to the needs of the body becomes lasting, and sometimes punitive, damage to health. Christian communal monasticism had as one of its purposes the moderation of individual extremes, but Pachomian or Basilian monasticism was far stricter than anything imagined by Iamblichus. Porphyry comes nearest to them with the non-Greek ascetic lifestyles he collected from first-century sources, which are perhaps the earliest examples of (actual or imagined) single-sex communities.

There is also a difference in concern for less privileged human beings. If a pagan ascetic in the later Roman empire chose to escape from the burdens of parenthood and civic obligation, other family members had to take on the renunciant's property and obligations. Neither Porphyry nor Iamblichus suggests that the poor should benefit from what the philosopher does not need. A Christian who renounced property would be expected to give in charity, but might, like the pagan, be most concerned with liberation from the burdens of property and status. Dressing like a *humilis* did not always, or often, mean living and working among the poor.<sup>37</sup> But the Christian ascetic was required to have humility, a sense of lowliness and dependence in relation to God and to spiritual superiors. A Christian who had renounced wealth and status might be surpassed by someone who had never had social status or education. The pagan ascetic, leading a deliberately simple life, was, like his role models, a member of a social, intellectual, and spiritual elite.

37. G. Clark, "Women and Asceticism in Late Antiquity."

Porphyry, according to Augustine (*De civitate Dei* 10.32), sought a "universal way" of salvation, but this does not mean a way accessible to all. Porphyry's universalism is that of the spiritual elite in a range of eastern Mediterranean cultures. He is contemptuous of the common man (*Abst.* 1.52.3–4) who cannot make the moral and intellectual effort required by *On Abstinence*, and still more of the philosophically educated Gnostic (1.42) who could make the effort, but claims that it is not necessary. Iamblichus is credited with wider sympathies because he argued, in *On the Mysteries*, that traditional cult, including animal sacrifice, was an expression of religious truth; but Julian's vocational clergy could not have used the writings of Iamblichus to instruct the simple faithful.

These are arguments, not for deliberate countering of Christianity by Porphyry and Iamblichus, but for a vocabulary of commitment common to pagan and Christian. Differences of practice, between pagan and pagan, as between pagan and Christian, depend on differences of belief about human beings in relation to God. Pythagoras and Plotinus, as presented by philosophical biographers, are intellectual giants who have undergone a lengthy education before they begin to teach. Their lives are narrated in order to help and inspire students of philosophy, and those students must be educated enough to make spiritual progress by work on their difficult texts, and disciplined enough to keep the demands of body and society in their place. But the great value of philosophic biography, for the late antique student and the present-day historian, is that it puts philosophy in context. The divine philosopher is seen as a living human being, who must lead and advocate the philosophic life in dialogue with students and colleagues and in the society of his time.

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## 2

Birth, Death, and Divinity in  
Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*

M. J. EDWARDS

Open any book about Plotinus, and it is almost sure to be prefaced by a chapter on his life. The method is that of Porphyry, his most successful pupil, and the content of the chapter in most cases will be drawn entirely from his introduction to the *Enneads*, although perhaps with an occasional animadversion on his dates.<sup>1</sup> The collaborative project recently edited in Paris by Luc Brisson has reminded us that the *Life* has all the usual opacities of a literary artifact; we may add to this a handful of articles, most of them by the same scholars, on the *Oracle of Apollo*, and some incidental remarks in F. M. Schroeder's magisterial essay on Ammonius Saccas.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Patricia Cox is still, so far as I know, the only author who has tried to grasp the pattern and the spirit of the whole, and it is her *Biography in Late Antiquity* that provides the starting point of the present chapter.<sup>3</sup>

Among the debated features of Cox's book is her distinction between biographies that present the main figure as "the son of a god" and those that confer on him only a "godlike status."<sup>4</sup> I do not think that this distinction, any more than the book itself, is asking to be read as either technical or exhaustive. We are all aware that Greek

has more than two such terms, and that each of the expressions θεός, δαίμων, υἱὸς θεοῦ, and θεῖος ἀνὴρ is employed with even less discrimination by the ancients than in modern studies of them.<sup>5</sup> I take it that the author's aim was therefore, not to foist a new precision on ancient writers who were neither lexicographers nor philosophers, but to make the important point that the biographies of different pagan saints are so constructed as to yield very different hints of their relation to the gods. In the following analysis of Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, I use his own vocabulary because, as a philosopher, he may be supposed to have chosen his words advisedly; we have the right to assume that if he verbally contradicts his own beliefs, it is because he is speaking through, or on behalf of, other men.

I argue here that one of the cardinal aims of the *Life*, at least when read in conjunction with the *Enneads*, is to make the reader privy to a mystery hidden from all the pupils and antagonists of Plotinus during his lifetime and not even discovered by the biographer until a short time before he prepared this work in commemoration of his master. First, I argue that, while Porphyry attributed supernatural capacities to his hero, he does not wish us to think that these were extraneously imparted or inherited at his birth. Second, the narrative of Plotinus's death estranges the master even from his pupils when the destiny that he promises to others in the *Enneads* is treated as peculiarly his own. Third, although the truth about Plotinus is unwittingly detected by a priest of his native Egypt, it can be comprehended only by a reader who already knows the *Enneads*. Fourth, the author's commentary on the *Oracle of Apollo* shows philosophy to be wiser than the gods.

This chapter will thus, I hope, fulfill the main purpose of this collection, the study of the uses of biographical literature in late antiquity. Such a collection of studies will inevitably lead us to ask whether late antiquity recognized a genre of biography; if we answer in the affirmative, we shall also wish to know whether Christianity appropriated the genre, and indeed whether Christian writings may have contributed to its evolution. Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* is a prime example in any account of late antique biography; I also hope to show

1. See, e.g., Rist, *Plotinus*, 2–20. Igal, *Cronología de la Vida de Plotino de Porfirio*, remains an outstanding contribution to the study of the chronology, on which Barnes, "Chronology," may also be consulted. All these works are interested in the *Life of Plotinus* as a historical text, not a literary one.

2. Brisson, ed., *Porphyre: Vie de Plotin*, vols. 1 and 2; Schroeder, "Ammonios Saccas."

3. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*. The final chapter deals with the *Life of Plotinus*.

4. Ibid., 20: "One paradigm, followed by Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius*), Porphyry (*Life of Pythagoras*) and Iamblichus (*Pythagorean life*) characterizes the divine philosopher as the son of a god. The other, followed by Porphyry (*Life of Plotinus*) and Eusebius (*Life of Origen*) attributes only a godlike status to the divine philosopher."

5. A discussion of, and antidote to, much loose modern writing on the subject of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ can be found in Francis, *Subversive Virtue*, 54–129.



here that it affords a proper subject for comparison with at least one eminent work in the Christian canon. My final argument, therefore, is that Porphyry's protagonist is intended to be, not merely a pagan saint, but a pagan Christ.

#### THE BIRTH OF PLOTINUS AND THE BIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION

I begin with the birth of Plotinus, if only because we have so much to learn from the fact that Porphyry does not. Plotinus is described in the opening sentence as ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς γεγωνὼς φιλόσοφος, which could be rendered as "the philosopher who came to be among us." This use of γίγνομαι is not unparalleled in *Life of Plotinus*, which says of the Gnostics γεγόνασι κατ' αὐτόν when it means that they were active in his time (VP 16). It is, however, strange to style Plotinus a contemporary of younger men without first saying something of his time of birth, which Porphyry himself had calculated at his death.<sup>6</sup>

Porphyry cannot have been unacquainted with the miraculous nativities attributed in his own century to men like Apollonius of Tyana. Philostratus, an older contemporary of Plotinus's, wrote, for example: "The people of that region [about Tyana] say that Apollonius was the son of Zeus, though he styled himself the son of Apollonius" (*Vita Apollonii* 1.6). Porphyry knew something of Apollonius's travels in India, which are mentioned in his treatise *On the Styx* and may have prompted him to assign the unlikely motive of visiting India to Plotinus when the latter joined the army of Gordian III.<sup>7</sup>

Miracles, clairvoyance, vegetarianism, and readiness to die are traits that both Plotinus and Apollonius share with the prototype of all philosophical biographies, Pythagoras. Tales of miraculous origin abound for this figure, although Porphyry may have borrowed both the legend and his detachment in rehearsing it from a celebrated work by Apollonius himself: "Apollonius in what he writes about Pythagoras gives his mother's name as Pythais, a descendant of Ancaeus the founder of Samos. Some say that he was the offspring of Apollo and

Pythais, though according to Apollonius, Mnesarchus was alleged to be his father" (Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae* p. 18.10 Nauck).<sup>8</sup>

Scholars have pointed out that the biographers who preserved these anecdotes did not endorse them,<sup>9</sup> and in any case divine paternity would not suffice of itself to make a man a god. Apollonius and Pythagoras, whatever their parentage, both lived and died as human beings, as is evident from the catalogues of their previous incarnations; Plotinus, the only one of the three who has no history before his life, is the only one whom the gods themselves acknowledge as divine.

If Porphyry had thought it anachronistic to attach the gods to the birth of a contemporary figure, he could have availed himself of the superstitions that surrounded those of Socrates and Plato. A life of Plato reminds us that the verb γίγνομαι denotes, not the reality or essence of a thing but its contingent occupation of time and space: "All that comes into being does so at a certain time and place. Now let us learn each of these, and also the manner and circumstances of his coming into being" (*Vita Platonis* p. 6.12–15 Westermann). The biographer has already said that Plato was born on the seventh day of Thargelion and Socrates on the sixth; from this he concludes that Plato had the better of his master, since the first was the day of Apollo and the second that of Artemis. Porphyry, by contrast, withholds the information that the verb γίγνομαι seems to promise, alleging that Plotinus "seemed ashamed to be in the body" and "could not bear to speak of his race, nor of his parents, nor of the land of his birth" (VP 1.1–3). The second chapter says that, while Plotinus honored the natal days of Socrates and Plato, "he did not think it proper for anyone to honor the day of his birth by feasts or sacrifice" and so would not divulge it. There was, however, at least one source, attested by Eunapius and the *Suda*, which professed to know the birthplace of Plotinus; Porphyry himself concedes that an Alexandrian sorcerer knew his birthday well enough to do him mischief through the influence of the stars.<sup>10</sup> Porphyry's ignorance surprised Eunapius, and we are entitled to suspect that it is feigned.

8. On Apollonius as a source for Pythagorean biography, see Rohde, "Quellen des Iamblichus in seiner Biographie des Pythagoras."

9. See, e.g., Francis, *Subversive Virtue*, 120–21. On the philosophical background to the passage, see O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 39 and n. 60.

10. See Eunapius, *Vitae philosophorum*, ed. Boissonade (= VS), p. 455.33–35; Porphyry, VP 2.37–42 (on the birthdays of philosophers); 15.21–26 (on the rejection of astrology); 10.4–5 (on the assault by Olympius).

6. *Life of Plotinus* (=VP) 2.29–31, ed. Henry and Schwyzer, *Plotini Opera*, 1: 1–38; Igal, *Cronologia*, 55–75.

7. VP 3.13–17. For discussion and bibliography, see Edwards, "Plotinus and the Emperors."

Even if Plotinus, like other prominent figures of his epoch, thought it dangerous to make his birthday public,<sup>11</sup> Porphyry would have needed other reasons for conniving at the reticence of his teacher once the latter had been delivered from his body. Marinus clearly thought that his *Life of Proclus* would enhance the reputation of its subject if it ended with a horoscope.<sup>12</sup> When Porphyry draws attention to Plotinus's refutation of astrology, this is partly a defense of his own omissions in the *Life*: "He studied the principles of astrology, though not like a practitioner, paying special attention to the methods which enable men to cast horoscopes; having ascertained that their conclusions were unreliable, he was not afraid to expose many things in their writings" (VP 15.21–26). Neither Plotinus nor his pupil wholly denied that stars possess some power to affect the body; but neither would allow that they were capable of determining the mind.<sup>13</sup> Any Neoplatonist would agree that the philosopher can lay no claim to virtue if he loses his autonomy; inherited divinity would compromise this no less than stellar influence, and perhaps it is because Porphyry sees more clearly than Philostratus or Marinus that he exempts his master's birth from every favorable accident and all suspicion of honorable parentage, whether human or divine.

#### DEATH AND REPUTATION

Astrologers of Porphyry's time may not have claimed to know Plotinus's horoscope, but they knew what he had suffered, and Firmicus Maternus cites his death as a refutation of his claim to freedom. Plotinus, he informs us, mocked the stars and built himself a residence in Campania, where he hoped to be secure from fate but found instead that virtue was no shield against the indignant constellations:

Not at all did he turn his mind or his eyes upon the end of Socrates or Plato. . . . Behold, as he was safe in this elated confidence the whole power of the fates threw itself upon him. First his limbs grew rigid with a cold torpor of the blood, and little by little his sight was

11. On the measures taken against astrology by emperors, see MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 235 ff.

12. See Marinus, *Vita Procli* 35–36. The importance of fixing the time of a person's *genesis* is emphasized at [Anonymi] *Vita Platonis* p. 6.12–15 Westermann.

13. See, e.g., *Enneads* 2.2–3 (on whether stars are causes) and 4.4.40 (on physical magic).

dimmed, so that his eyes lost their sharpness and splendour. After this a pest erupted through the whole of his skin, and the consequent putrefaction of his body was accompanied by the wasting of his limbs and the corruption of his blood. Every day and hour, minute parts of his entrails were dissolved by the illness that was creeping through them. Where the observer had seen a healthy organ, it was suddenly deformed by the ulceration of his expiring body. (F. Maternus, *Mathesis* 1.20–21)

This syndrome of conventional diseases is as likely to originate in poetry as in the records of Plotinus's own physician. Paul Henry is no doubt right to maintain, against Hans Oppermann, that Maternus has merely embellished the account that he found in Porphyry, incidentally confusing the project for constructing Platonopolis with the retirement of Plotinus to his deathbed in Campania.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, the long narrative that Porphyry devotes to this cruel episode suggests that it was sufficiently notorious already to be the subject of polemic. He preempts the exultation of the astrologers by telling us at the outset that Plotinus did not care for either his body or his birthday, and he vindicates his freedom by asserting that he left Rome voluntarily to spare his friends the affliction of his presence (2.20f.). By making this the first date in his biography, he reminds us that the founder of his philosophy had defined it as a preparation for death;<sup>15</sup> and he puts into the mouth of the expiring sage two sentences suggesting that his long struggle with the body is more conducive than a quiet or sudden departure would have been to the elevation of the soul.

In the *Life*, Plotinus is superior to his illness, choosing when and how to end it. Eustochius arrives in time to hear his patient say, "I am waiting for you," but at once it becomes apparent that he is waiting not for medicine but for death:

When he was about to die, so Eustochius informed us, the latter, who was living in Puetoli, came to his bed with little haste. Plotinus said, "I am still waiting for you," and then "I am trying to lift up the divine within me [τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον] to the divine in the All [τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον]." (VP 2.23–27)

14. On the Platonopolis project, see Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 12, and Edwards, "Plotinus and the Emperors." Oppermann, *Plotins Leben*, argues that Eustochius was Firmicus's source, but is rebutted by Henry, *Plotin et l'Occident*, 25–43.

15. Plato, *Phaedo* 64a. Further analogies with this Platonic dialogue will become apparent from the following discussion.

Plotinus greets Eustochius with a sentence of the same type as the one with which he is said to have commenced his philosophical career: he exclaimed of Ammonius Saccas, τοῦτον ἐζήτουν, and here he says to his last disciple, σε ἔτι περιμένω.<sup>16</sup> The most eminent philosopher to have watched his master's deathbed was Pythagoras, who attended Pherecydes during equally painful and protracted symptoms.<sup>17</sup> It is not, however, given to Plotinus's doctor to maintain so long a vigil, or do anything but catch the valediction of his liberated soul. The content of this utterance, which ought to have been the most pregnant of his life, is partly concealed from us by the textual tradition. Henry's celebrated article lists the following variants:<sup>18</sup>

I am trying to reconcile the divine in myself [or, in us] to the divine in the All.

Try to reconcile the god in yourselves [τόν ἐν ὑμῖν θεόν] to the divine in the All.

Try to reconcile the divine in yourselves [τό ἐν ὑμῖν θεῖον] to the divine in the All.

There is external evidence, if we know how to use it rightly, in a letter by Synesius of Cyrene, where he tells his correspondent to "lead back the divinity in yourself to the ancestral divinity" (τό ἐν σαυτῷ θεῖον ἀναγε ἐπὶ τὸ πρόγονον θεῖον), adding that "they say that this was the dictum of Plotinus."<sup>19</sup> But σαυτῷ is not a variant in the manuscripts of Porphyry's *Life*, and Synesius's object is not to reproduce the words exactly but to apply them. His statement affords no evidence that Plotinus used the second-person pronoun, and indeed it suggests the opposite; for if, as he implies, the words were passing into a proverb, the identity of the speaker would be lost and they

16. See *Vita Plotini* 3.13 for Plotinus's verdict on Ammonius Saccas, which recalls Antisthenes' compliment to Socrates, recorded by Jerome, *Adv. Jovinianum* 2.14.344: "Go and seek another master, for I have found mine."

17. See esp. Apuleius, *Florida* 15; Diogenes Laertius 1.117–8; Aelian, *Varia Historia* 4.28. On the life of Pherecydes, which includes a number of miracles foreshadowing those of his supposed pupil Pythagoras, see Schibli, *Pherekydes of Syros*, 140–75. On the literary epidemic called phthiriasis, which carried off Plato, Speusippus, and Alcman as well as Pherecydes, see Keaveney and Madden, "Phthiriasis and Its Victims."

18. See Henry, "Dernière parole de Plotin."

19. Synesius, *Ep.* 138, cited by Henry, "Dernière parole de Plotin," 127. On Synesius's knowledge of the Neoplatonists, see Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene*, 145–54.

would be bound to take the form of an exhortation. We can understand how a copyist would substitute the proverb for a statement; it is harder to surmise how, if Plotinus had employed the second person, it could have been superseded by the first.

The true variant, then, is the one in which Plotinus makes a statement about himself. The word θεόν is not attested here any more than in the allusion by Synesius; its presence in one rejected reading may be best explained as the result of assimilation to the *Enneads*, where Plotinus does indeed speak of the "god within each of us" (τὸν ἐν ἐκάστῳ ἡμῶν θεόν), referring to the *nous* or intellect that dwells in every rational being and implying no distinction between his pupils and himself.<sup>20</sup> The words ascribed to him here imply a consciousness of something that must be spoken of more reticently, something therefore higher than a god and not to be shared with his deciduous admirers. Porphyry was the only one to be absent by command and not by choice,<sup>21</sup> and so it falls to him to expound in chapters 10 and 23 of his biography what he intimates discreetly in chapter 2.

Eustochius left one other observation that found its way into Porphyry's redaction of the scene: "A snake crawled out of the bed in which he lay and slipped out through an aperture in the wall, and at that moment he breathed out his spirit, being, as Eustochius said, a man of sixty-six years" (VP 2.27–30).

The snake can hardly be, as some have thought, the "allotted daemon of Plotinus," for, as we shall see, the *Enneads* do not suggest that this could take a shape outside the body, while Porphyry maintains that it did, but in a different form.<sup>22</sup> Emile Bréhier refers to Hermes Trismegistus, who is likened to Plotinus by the historian Ammianus Marcellinus;<sup>23</sup> but since Ammianus lived a century later, and the Egyptian Hermes finds no place in the works of either Porphyry or Plotinus, this conjecture can be supported only by an appeal to the

20. Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.5.1.

21. See *Vita Plotini* 11.11 ff. for Porphyry's journey to Sicily; Eunapius's account suggests, on the contrary, that he returned before Plotinus died (*Vitae Philosophorum* p. 453.2 Boissonade). See further Goulet, "Variations romanesques sur la mélancolie de Porphyre." On the importance of being present (or excusing one's absence) at the death of one's master, cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 59b, and Owen, "Philosophical Invective," esp. 11 ff.

22. See below on *Enneads* 2.4; also Edwards, "Two Episodes from Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*."

23. Plotin: *Les Enneades*, ed. Bréhier, 1.2 n. 1; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Historiae* 22.16.15–16.

"superstition of the Alexandrian Eustochius." We have no reason to think that an Alexandrian would have been especially prone to superstition, and in any case we have to explain, not why the thing was stated by Eustochius, but why it was transcribed in this biography.

One answer (which I think both new and true, but not sufficient) would be that Porphyry intended to draw a contrast with the unsuccessful fraud essayed by Heraclides Ponticus, an early and irresponsible biographer of Pythagoras,<sup>24</sup> who is said to have been a charlatan in death as well as life:

He had a grown snake, which he had reared from its infancy. When his death was approaching, he requested one of his confidants to conceal his body and place the snake in his bed, so that he would seem to have gone to the gods. And as the citizens were carrying out the bier and blessing the name of Heraclides, the snake, disturbed by the noise, crept out of the robes to general consternation. Subsequently, however, the fraud was detected and Heraclides was known, not as he made himself appear, but as he was. (Diogenes Laertius 5.6.89)

Plotinus, too, is seen in death "not as he would appear, but as he was"; but since he had no confidants and little expectation of an audience, he cannot be suspected of deceit. Nor can Porphyry mean us to interpret the departing snake as his master's soul, for he himself did not believe that human souls migrated after death into animal bodies,<sup>25</sup> and such a change on any view would be, not release, but the penalty of wrongdoing. Heraclides Ponticus was a man to be outdone, like Pherecydes, but only one philosopher had died in a way that was always agreed to merit emulation. Firmicus Maternus sneered that his great contemporary forgot the end of Socrates; it would not escape a disciple that the comparison could be given a far more favorable turn.

The death of Socrates, like that of Plotinus, began in the lower regions of the body, and it would have been a source of shame to his disciples had not he himself construed it as a blessing when he gave instructions for a final sacrifice: "Critias," he said, "we owe a cock to Asclepius; let him have it and don't forget" (*Phaedo* 118a7–8). Satirists and Christians were amused by this belated vow; Damascius's reply

24. See Gottschalk, *Heraclides of Pontus*, 110ff.

25. At least according to Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.30; although Stobaeus, *Eclogae* 1.41.60, implies a literal understanding of transmigration.

is that Asclepius, the divine physician, is here receiving paradoxical honors as the deity who effects the separation of soul and body.<sup>26</sup> Death is the remedy of the true philosopher, who perceives that the disease is life itself. Asclepius, as a chthonic god, was often represented by a serpent, and appeared thus in the dreams of those who came to his temples seeking only bodily salvation.<sup>27</sup> Plotinus is in no temple, and the lateness of Eustochius might have led us to suppose that he died for want of a physician; but the presence of Eustochius coincides with the departure of the snake to make it obvious that their roles are complementary. Each is a doctor, each with his task, and only the human doctor need remain to gather up the mortal wrappings. Porphyry has composed a novel scene in which a man receives the visit of Asclepius and decides upon his own remedy; but how could it be otherwise when the living man had told his bewildered pupils that "the gods should come to me, not I to them?"<sup>28</sup>

#### KNOWING THE GOD WITHIN

This saying is reported in the tenth chapter as an epilogue to two frustrated intrigues by exponents of a false power over nature. The first of these, mentioned earlier as a possible explanation for the concealment of his birthday, is an attack upon the body of Plotinus through the heavens:

One of those with pretensions to philosophy was Olympius, an Alexandrian . . . who endeavoured to work against him through the magic of the stars. But when he found that the attempt had turned against himself he said to his cronies, "Great is the force of Plotinus' soul, for it can reciprocate the attacks of those who try to do him harm." Plotinus, for his part, resisted the machinations of Olympius, saying that his body at that time was being drawn together "like the contracted purses" as his members were compressed. But Olympius, once he was in danger of suffering more himself than he did to Plotinus, desisted; for Plotinus had something more by birth than others. (*VP* 10.1–15)

26. See *Phaedo* 118a; Damascius/Olympiodorus, *In Phaedonem* pp. 205 and 241 Norvin. For satiric comments, see Lucian, *Bis Accusatus* 5 and Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 3.20.16–17.

27. See testimonia collected in Edelstein, *Asclepius*.

28. *VP* 10.35. The superiority of philosophers to gods is acknowledged even by Porphyry, *Sententiae* p. 31.8 Lamberz, so that his claim to be ignorant of Plotinus's meaning here would seem to be intended to set a puzzle for the reader.

Porphyry, with the same candor that he displays in his account of the mortal illness of Plotinus, does not conceal the pains that he incurred from these assaults. Instead, he subordinates them to philosophy by making Plotinus use a flippant metaphor that Plato had applied to the creation of the sexes;<sup>29</sup> the sage who "seemed ashamed to be in the body" thus reminds himself and us that our afflictions are not the consequence of any discrete event, but of our mere corporeal presence in the world.

Olympius himself imputes his failure to the force of Plotinus's soul, and Porphyry adds that he had something more by birth than other mortals. Porphyry does not gloss this by repeating what was said about Pythagoras, that "he let men know that he was of greater seed than that according to mortal nature."<sup>30</sup> For one thing, his Plotinus is too humble to reveal his powers except on irresistible provocation; for another he has the commentary to hand in Plotinus's treatise *On Our Allotted Personal Daemon*, which he represents as the sequel to another inadvertent demonstration of these powers:

Plotinus has something more by birth than others. For a certain Egyptian priest arrived in Rome and became known to him through a friend. Wishing to make a display of his wisdom he invited Plotinus to come and see an exhibition of his so-called proper daemon that dwelt within him. Plotinus agreeing readily, the conjuration took place in the Temple of Isis, this being, as he said, the only pure spot that he could find in Rome. The daemon was summoned, but proved on becoming visible to be not one of the race of daemons but a god. The Egyptian cried "O blessed art thou, whose companion daemon is not one of the lesser race but a god." . . . There is indeed a book written by him as a result of this occasion, entitled "On our Allotted Daemon," in which he explores the reasons for the distinction between the companions. (VP 10.15–32)

This treatise is *Enneads* 3.4, and was written before Plotinus made the acquaintance of his biographer. Porphyry has described the contents better than the occasion, for the daemon of which Plotinus speaks could hardly have been evoked by any rite. It is the fate allotted to the soul at the beginning of each embodiment, or rather the future state that it should strive to attain in the course of that embodiment. It is

29. *Symposium* 190e on the σύσπαστα βαλλάντια. Plotinus himself put a serious construction on the myth, citing 192e at *Enneads* 6.5.1.16.

30. Cf. Aelian, *Varia Historia* 4.17.

not the driving force within the body that the astrologers (and Porphyry) would have called the natal daemon; rather, it is the star that the aspiring mind has adopted as its pilot (3.4.6), and this pilotage is assumed to be both benevolent and compatible with freedom. It is left to the biographer to insinuate that Plotinus was unique in being the master, not the victim, of his birth.<sup>31</sup>

The priest betrays his ignorance by assuming that a daemon, which is merely the state of soul above the present one, must be always something other than a god. Porphyry is satisfied that the rivals of Plotinus should confess his superiority; that superiority is all the more apparent, and the confession more sincere, when it is framed in the crude vocabulary of the defeated party. Literature offered precedents for such contests, where Pythagoras gets the better of Apollo's priest Abaris, or Apollonius prophesies misfortune to a celebrant of the Eleusinian mysteries;<sup>32</sup> but Porphyry's innovation is to link the tale to a treatise that, if the link were sound, would put a wholly new construction on it. Plotinus says that one who lives entirely in his intellect is the equal of those gods who would otherwise have been his guardians; such a man he knew himself to be, and we must thus conclude, with Armstrong, that his tutelary daemon is the One.<sup>33</sup>

#### CORRECTING THE GODS

These early chapters of the *Vita Plotini* have been a riddle to those not already acquainted with the teaching of Plotinus. Porphyry says that his master was of rarer birth than others, yet conspires with him to conceal the time and place of it; the dying sage is conscious of a divinity within him, and, in chapter 10, we appear to see the undeniable signs of both its presence and its nature, yet the book that is recommended as an interpretant subverts the origin of the sign itself. So long as we are hampered by the defective understanding of a Eustochius, an Olympius, or an Isiac priest, it is only by an inference (if at all) that we can name the divine companion of Plotinus. The *Life* does not so

31. Thus Plotinus is a philosopher, not a magician. See Armstrong, "Was Plotinus a Magician?" against Merlan, "Plotinus and Magic." On the natal daemon and related figures, see Edwards, "Two Images," 163–65.

32. Iamblichus, *De vita Pythagorica* 92; Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 4.18.2. In each case the man who professes a peculiar wisdom or talent discovers that he has encountered his superior.

33. See *Enneads* 3.4.6 and the introduction to Armstrong, *Plotinus*, 3: 141.

much endorse the witnesses to his greatness as supply us with the materials to correct them, and Porphyry concludes that the authoritative verdict must be delivered by the gods: "But what is all this talk of mine about a tree and a rock, as Hesiod says? For if one ought to use the testimonies that come from the wisest, who could be wiser than a god?" (VP 22.1–4). Porphyry belonged to a generation of philosophers who no longer thought it childish to believe that the gods expressed themselves in verse. In this time, the Sibyls revived, the Orphic fragments multiplied, and Empedocles acquired a new reputation as a poet; Porphyry compiled at least one digest of the *Philosophy to be Imbued from Oracles* and perhaps another work entitled *On the Regression of the Soul*.<sup>34</sup> The supposed *Chaldaean Oracles*, on which this was based, were manufactured by and for philosophers,<sup>35</sup> and so, we may suspect, is the one recorded in the *Life* as having been spoken to Amelius; for it comes from one of Apollo's shrines, which were never so verbose and were alleged in the previous century to have lapsed either into prose or into silence.<sup>36</sup> The precedents that Porphyry himself cites are archaic—two verses from Herodotus and the famous testimonial to Socrates;<sup>37</sup> archaic, too, is the diction, which conceals at least as much as it discloses and can only be construed by a second act of divination, Porphyry's commentary in chapter 23.

The apophthegm that justifies the quotation of the *Oracle of Apollo* is from Hesiod's *Theogony*; his *Works and Days* supplies the leading image, with its story that the first generation of mortals, the most virtuous and the happiest, were a race of gold who when they perished took the form of tutelary daemons.<sup>38</sup> Plotinus is saluted in the *Oracle* as a man who now enjoys, along with Minos, Rhadamanthus, and the rest of the "golden race," the "more divine estate of daemons"; five times the word is used of his new condition, but his soul in life already possessed this quality, and what he now receives from Zeus, he has

34. See O'Meara, *Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine*, on the *De regressu animae* in *De civitate Dei* 10.

35. See, e.g., Saffrey, "Neoplatoniciens et les oracles chaldaïques."

36. See Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum* and *De Pythiae oraculis*. Many scholars are, however, willing to believe that the oracle emanated from a shrine: see, e.g., Brisson, "Oracle d'Apollon dans la Vie de Plotin par Porphyre," where he favors a shrine in Asia Minor; on these see Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 177–85.

37. See Herodotus 1.47; Plato, *Apology* 21a.

38. See Hesiod, *Opera* 115ff.; Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre*, 126 n. 1; Goulet, "Oracle d'Apollon dans la Vie de Plotin."

earned by his dauntless ardor in pursuing the goal illumined by the "radiance" from above.<sup>39</sup> This notion of return to a primordial felicity, is not, however, derived from Hesiod but from Empedocles, who represents himself as a fallen daemon but exults in his redemption by proclaiming himself to be "no longer a mortal, but a god."<sup>40</sup>

The *Oracle's* phrase is δαῖμον, ἄνερ τὸ πάροιθεν, but Plotinus himself preferred the Empedoclean θεὸς ἄμβροτος, οὐκέτι θνητός.<sup>41</sup> Porphyry must have seen that this discrepancy between Apollo's language and his master's is the symptom of a fundamental difference in the thought. The seer includes himself among the gods who have the power to bestow felicity on such beings as Plotinus, who can aspire to no higher state than that of daemons. A Platonist would have answered that Apollo himself in his mantic role is not so much a deity as a daemon,<sup>42</sup> and Plotinus, as we have seen, maintained that the gods should come to him. Porphyry pretends not to understand him, but this is merely an indication that his *Life* is of a propaedeutic character; for in the *Sententiae*, he himself distinguishes between those who have obtained the rank of θεοί by their philosophic virtues, and those who have risen higher to deserve the appellation, "father of gods."<sup>43</sup> This phrase is elucidated in the writing that his own edition treats as the summit of his master's thought: "For activity [*energeia*] also generates gods in silence by contact with [the One], and it generates beauty, righteousness and virtue" (*Enneads* 6.9.9). In an earlier paragraph (6.9.7), the story that Minos was the son of Zeus is understood as a prefigurement of the intimacy with the One to which the human soul aspires. The Eros and Aphrodite of the *Symposium* are now not so much the causes as the progeny of this ascent, and this alone the philosopher will acknowledge as his goal. Discoverable only by the *logos* of philosophy, the One, in Porphyry's commentary on the *Oracle*, is the key that unlocks the *muthos* of a less enlightened seer:

39. For daemons or the daemoniac in the *Oracle*, see VP 22. 23, 46, 47, 57, 59. For the radiance from above, see VP 22.29ff.

40. On Empedocles in Neoplatonism, see Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.7.10, 4.8.12, etc., with Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae* p. 33 Nauck, and Edwards, "Late Use of Empedocles."

41. Empedocles, Fr. 112.4 DK, cited by Plotinus at *Enneads* 4.7.10.38.

42. See, e.g., Apuleius, *De Deo Socratis*, provoking a Christian rejoinder in Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.

43. See n. 28 above. On the uses of the term θεός in the *Enneads*, see Rist, "Theos and the One."

And as he kept on drawing himself by this daemonic light towards the first and transcendent God, through meditation and according to the methods described by Plato in the *Symposium*, there appeared to him that God who has neither form nor any concept, but is seated above the mind and all intelligible. To this I Porphyry testify that I also once approached and was united in my sixty-eighth year. So then the "nearby goal" appeared to Plotinus. (VP 23.7–14)

Without at least one experience of divine illumination, Porphyry could not, in a single passage, have offered such tendentious readings of the *Oracle of Apollo*, Plato's *Symposium*, and Plotinus's own allusions to the "god who sits within us."<sup>44</sup> In the *Life*, the acolytes of other gods bestow their ignorant praises on the sage, who has disarmed them by his miracles, and after his death, the failure of understanding will be even more acute. At the same time, it is easier to correct, for it is now contending, not with the spontaneous defenses of his body, but with the thoughts of his imperishable mind.

#### BIOGRAPHY AND GOSPEL

It should be observed at this point that the work I have called the *Life* of Plotinus in this chapter received a slightly different title from its author: he named it *On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of His Works*. In the usage of the period, such prepositional phrases denote a work of a partisan character, nearer to panegyric than to what we now call biography, and intended to support the cause or polity that its subject introduced into the world. Just as Porphyry's memoir is a preface to fifty-four treatises, so Philostratus's *Concerning Apollonius of Tyana* was succeeded by the *Letters* of that philosopher; Iamblichus's *On the Pythagorean Life* is the first of ten books in a projected encyclopedia; and the fifth book of Eusebius's *On the Life of Constantine* is an *Oration to the Saints*.<sup>45</sup>

One English word for a narrative with such a patent tendency is *gospel*, and it would not be surprising if the exponent of a new Platonism conceived his own memorial of his master as a pagan contribution to this genre. He produced it perhaps a little after 300 A.D., and

44. The illumination comes to Porphyry when he is the same age as that of Plotinus at death; he will not allow himself to be the equal of his master.

45. For further consideration of this point, see my "Epilogue: Biography and the Biographic."

his own *Contra Christianos* may have been written about the same time, with the intention of enhancing or excusing the severity of Diocletian's measures against the Christians.<sup>46</sup> The Gospels were already being compared with the Philostratean account of Apollonius, and one at least had been perused with sympathetic attention by a Platonist, who exclaimed that the opening verses of the Fourth Gospel should be inscribed in permanent characters of gold.<sup>47</sup>

Desire to outshine Amelius, to overreach Philostratus, or to belittle Christianity would all have been strong motives for the writing of a Neoplatonic gospel. Polemic may, however, be compatible with respectful imitation, especially when an author has so much in common with Porphyry as the fourth evangelist. Each professed to write from personal knowledge; each ascribed the wisdom of his master to a deity and contrasted it with the superficial piety of his rivals; each presented himself as the interpreter of a text in which those rivals would have sought a different meaning; each maintained, against less perceptive disciples, that the world had more to learn from the master's death than from his birth. To take three points:

1. In both accounts the rivals look for truth in the wrong locality. Plotinus shows that he, not the temple of Isis, is the true seat of divinity; Jesus in the Fourth Gospel treats the temple as a symbol of his body, and denies that God prescribes any place of worship.<sup>48</sup> The "Jews" who frequent the temple are revealed to be ignorant of their own religion; and, just as the astrologer and the priest maintain their errors even when they commend Plotinus, so when Caiaphas speaks of Jesus "dying for the people," we are told that he did not perceive the import of his words.<sup>49</sup>

46. See Barnes, "Porphyry against the Christians," for a late dating of the *Contra Christianos*. Porphyry may be one of the philosophers said by Lactantius at *Div. inst.* 5.2 to have trampled on the prostrate Christians during the persecution by Galerius. I am inclined to accept the argument of Simmons, *Arnobius of Sicca*, that Arnobius is responding to Porphyry's treatise, but I would assign a later date to the Latin apologist.

47. See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.29. Augustine himself was wiser than Amelius: see his famous contrast between Neoplatonism and the incarnational theology of the Christians at *Confessions* 7.9.

48. John 2.21 (Jesus' body as temple); 4.21–24 (worship in Spirit, not in Jerusalem).

49. John 11.49–50. Caiaphas unwittingly parodies Jesus' own allegations of ignorance at 3.8–11, 4.23, etc.

2. The sacred *text* that vindicates Plotinus is an oracle; in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus tells the Jews to "search the scriptures." The latter text explains itself no better than the former, for the evangelist is asking us to believe in a Messiah who was neither born in Bethlehem nor preceded by Elijah.<sup>50</sup> Both testimonies call for an interpreter, not in spite of, but because of their assumed infallibility. The hermeneutical instruments for Porphyry are the *Enneads* and the dialogues of Plato; the Christ of the evangelist needs no instrument, because he is the embodied Word of God. Porphyry assimilates events to books; the evangelist is guided by the continuing revelation of the Logos through the Paraclete, and his book is the event.<sup>51</sup>
3. For the fourth evangelist, the Cross is both a signal, drawing everyone to Jesus, and a means of grace, restoring him to the glory that he possessed before the world as the only-begotten of the Father. Yet no account is given of this begetting, because, as Logos, he was always with the Father, and as Son he was born, "not of blood or the will of the flesh, but of the will of God."<sup>52</sup> All that can be said of his nativity is ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, "the Word became flesh"; when Cyril of Alexandria spoke of Christ as one who "came to be man among us" (καθ' ἡμᾶς γενέσθαι ἄνθρωπον), he chose the verb of generation carefully, to remind us that the Word experienced no change in himself.<sup>53</sup> Plotinus, the "philosopher who came to be among us," dies at peace with his guiding deity; the Christ of the fourth evangelist proves his unity with the Father when he gives his life without complaint and takes it back at will.<sup>54</sup>

I do not suggest that Porphyry would have called his work a gospel; the Church of his day acknowledged only four, and when they were

50. John 5.39 (on searching the Scriptures, either indicative or imperative); 8.42 (Messiah alleged to be born at Bethlehem); 1.21 (John the Baptist, not Elijah, in contrast to Mark 9.13).

51. See esp. John 14–16, and the assimilation of Jesus to the Torah at 10.35.

52. John 12.31–32 (the Cross draws all men); 1.13 (born of the will of God). Whether the true reading of the latter be singular or plural, it includes Jesus; but any allusion to the Virgin Birth is secondary to the implication that *any* physical circumstances of birth are beside the point.

53. Cyril of Alexandria, *Ad Nestorium* 3.8.

54. John 10.17; 19.28–30. At John 19.30, Jesus gives up his spirit; at VP 2, Plotinus lets his spirit go.

more numerous, the term defined the intention of a writing, not its form.<sup>55</sup> Here—and I would say, not only here—it is better to speak of common themes and elements, of influences or models, than of genre. There are certainly common elements, I have argued that there could have been an influence, and I think that there is a demonstrable unity of aim. Porphyry's *Life* begins with a criticism of the trick by which Amelius perpetuated the body of Plotinus in a portrait;<sup>56</sup> the fourth evangelist's proem is ostentatiously indifferent to the human birth of Jesus, which had been immortalized in other gospels. In both the *Life* and the Gospel, the protagonist has the right to be called a god, but in neither book is this perceived by others before his death. The *logos*-proem points, like Apollo's *Oracle*, to a life too long for history, so that neither *Life* nor Gospel can pretend to be an adequate memorial. One is an introduction to the *Enneads*, the other an earthly sampler of that multitude of volumes, yet unwritten, which "the world could not contain."<sup>57</sup>

55. Others now extant include the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Nicodemus, and the Gospel of the Egyptians. The diversity of form and content is remarkable.

56. See Edwards, "Portrait of Plotinus."

57. John 21.25.

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## 3

## Form and Meaning

*The Vita Constantini and the Vita Antonii*

AVERIL CAMERON

The *Life of Constantine* and the *Life of Antony* were written, without pressing the details, not much more than twenty years apart. The latter, highly contentious though it is, is regarded by all as the paradigm of a saint's life. The former has so far defied description. I assume here that its author was Eusebius of Caesarea, and that while it was edited for public consumption, probably very soon after Eusebius's death in 339, it has not been substantially interpolated or falsified.<sup>1</sup> Much debate surrounds its literary form, whether biography, panegyric, or history, or some kind of combination. T. D. Barnes has recently revived (and reversed) the thesis of Giorgio Pasquali according to which it began as a panegyric and ended as a kind of documentary history; on Barnes's view it is the other way round—it started as a continuation of the *Ecclesiastical History* soon after 325, but changed its form as Eusebius later turned to writing a panegyric in the emperor's last years, and still more as Constantine's life came to its end.<sup>2</sup> There are problems with this view and with its detailed exposition, as I have argued at length elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Suffice it here to say that I believe the work to be a hybrid, because I believe that Eusebius was a literary pioneer here, as he was also in the *Ecclesiastical History* and the *Chronicle*. The *Life* is certainly neither a conventional imperial panegyric, nor a history, nor yet a biography as we might currently understand the word. There may well have been successive alter-

ations to the work. But Eusebius knew what he was doing, as can be seen from the immensely detailed and careful way in which he has used, picked apart, and manipulated his earlier account of some of the same events in Constantine's life from the *Ecclesiastical History* and turned them in the *Life* into something different yet related.

Though it may help to elucidate some of the individual elements, Barnes's attempt to identify every sentence and section in the *Life of Constantine* as belonging to the "panegyric" or the "documentary history" has the signal disadvantage of obscuring the many interesting questions that remain to be asked about the work taken as a whole. In pointing out the similarity between the *Lives* of Constantine and Antony, each of which has been so puzzling to generations of scholars, it will be best to do so without prejudging the issue of the literary form of the *Life of Constantine*. One must also take care to avoid the danger of jumping to conclusions based on a title (εἰς τὸν βίον) not Eusebius's own. I should also emphasize that I am referring throughout only to the Greek *Life of Antony*.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the comparison offers some food for thought for anyone interested in the development of Christian biography.

At first sight, the two works seem very different, yet perhaps they are not so far apart as they appear. Without venturing into the thorny territory of Athanasian authorship<sup>5</sup> one can nevertheless begin by remembering that Athanasius and Eusebius were not in fact unknown to each other. Athanasius not only knew Eusebius, naming him among the group of his own enemies associated with Eusebius of Nicomedia; he even cites his work. Part of the backdrop to the later stages of the *Life of Constantine*, in turn, is Eusebius's consciousness of the danger presented to men of his own persuasion, and (as he saw it) to the Constantinian settlement, by the recall of Athanasius from exile after Constantine's death. The *Life of Constantine* is, as we have it, a Mirror for Princes, the princes being the sons of Constantine; Athanasius, exiled at the Council of Tyre, to which the *Life* tendentiously refers (VC 4.41), is one of those from whose dangerous seductions the princes are to be dissuaded. The *Life of Antony*, not surprisingly, takes a diametrically opposing view, with its clear messages

1. See Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* (= VC) in the critical edition by Winkelmann, *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 1: *Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin*.

2. Barnes, "Panegyric, History and Hagiography in Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*"; id., "The Two Drafts of Eusebius's *Vita Constantini*."

3. See Cameron, "Eusebius's *Vita Constantini* and the Construction of Constantine," with more detailed discussion and references on some of the points made here; the form of the *Life of Constantine* is also discussed in Wilson, "Biographical Models."

4. See Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* (= VA) in the critical edition by G. J. M. Bartelink, *Athanasie d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine*.

5. See below and Rousseau, "Antony as Teacher in the Greek Life," chapter 4 of this volume.

of the superiority of the holy man to the dictates of the imperial will, and of Antony's heroic opposition to Arianism, exactly the issues on which Eusebius might be thought to have taken his stand.

Both works are self-conscious in the extreme. Their form makes reference, even if not explicitly, to other established genres. The vaunted "simplicity" of Antony, who is presented as rejecting education and then conversing with pagan philosophers and exchanging letters with emperors, is not simplicity in any objective sense; rather, the description is a term of art;<sup>6</sup> it claims for him moral truth over its supposed opposite, the "deceit" of philosophers and the worldly wise. This contrast already had a long history in Christian writing, from St. Paul onwards, and is a prominent theme in the Apocryphal Acts and the Ps. Clementine *Recognitiones*. It has its complement in the *Life of Constantine* in the theme of Constantine's alleged ignorance of the truth, brought up as he was away from the piety of his father and in the court of Diocletian. Nor is the *Life of Constantine* any less apologetic a work than others in Eusebius's oeuvre—it is as apologetic, for instance, as the *Praeparatio Evangelica*, where Eusebius is at pains to refute the claims of Porphyry. Indeed, Constantine is portrayed in the *Life* as Moses in just such a way as to overturn the arguments whereby Porphyry had claimed Moses for the pagan side. The emperor is deliberately cast in the guise of sage and prophet, not only like Moses, but also like the pagan wonder-worker Apollonius of Tyana, whose *Life* Eusebius knew and wished to answer.<sup>7</sup> The pagan Hierocles, indeed, had made good use of Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* as a counterpart to the Christian Gospels.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Eusebius already knew how to apply the biographical model to Christian use; he had previously attempted a model Christian *Life* in the section on Origen in book 6 of the *Ecclesiastical History*, where, as part of his apologetic aim, he had presented Origen as a Hellenistic divine man and sage.<sup>9</sup> In turn, the Greek *Life of Antony*, whether

Athanasian or not, aims to subvert pagan and classical models. Antony discourses in classic fashion and is presented as a familiar type of late antique, though not necessarily Christian, holy man. But like Constantine, Antony is also seen in the light of scriptural prototypes—Moses, Jacob, Elijah, Elisha, and Job.<sup>10</sup> T. D. Barnes dismisses the possibility of Athanasian authorship,<sup>11</sup> but the *Life of Antony* is in fact a sophisticated composition fully compatible with the theological and political concerns of Athanasius.<sup>12</sup> Each of these *Lives* presents problems of formal analysis; but in both, however it is classified, the literary form makes clear reference to existing, and far from artless, literary exemplars. The form is inseparable from the meaning or the message; in the sixties phrase, "The medium is the message."

This becomes clearer if we look at some of the elements that the two works share and have in common with others before and after them. This way of reading the text is more familiar in the case of the *Life of Antony* than in that of the *Life of Constantine*, whose vast bibliography considers it mainly in terms of its reliability or otherwise as a historical source for Constantine, or in relation to its authenticity, or as a repository of Eusebian political theory or church-state relations. Yet the two works in fact deconstruct in similar ways.

Take the theme of "simplicity," for example. Antony rejects the world of culture for the desert, and there attains enlightenment; he then teaches the wise, including emperors and philosophers. Similarly, Constantine has to learn the identity of his father's god, and, like Moses, to have the details of true religion explained, even after God has sent him a sign in the form of the vision of the Cross.<sup>13</sup> Both Constantine and Antony come to knowledge gradually, through signs and trials, but then they are each able to direct and instruct others through their discourses. The "true" learning of the spirit is contrasted with mere school cleverness.<sup>14</sup> Constantine miraculously ar-

10. See *Vie d'Antoine*, ed. Bartelink, 48–51.

11. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 240, n. 64, with Louth, "St. Athanasius and the Greek *Life of Antony*."

12. For some arguments about Athanasian theology in the *Life*, see Louth, "St. Athanasius." For bibliography and for the history of the problem, see *Vie d'Antoine*, ed. Bartelink, introduction, and Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*, 126–32.

13. VC 1.27, 32; Constantine does not know the identity of his father's god (1.27) and to interpret it, he has to summon Christian clerics, who explain who it was that appeared to him in his dream of Christ and who the God who sent his vision is.

14. For the vocabulary used for this contrast in Antony's debate with the philosophers, see Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 256–57.

6. On VA 2 (Antony's call to the ascetic life), see Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 46–47; on "simplicity," see Rubenson, "Philosophy and Simplicity," chapter 5 in this volume, and Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 79, 95–96, 112–13.

7. For the *Contra Hieroclem*, see Hägg, "Hierocles the Lover of Truth and Eusebius the Sophist" (doubting that Eusebius is the author); Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 71.

8. See Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 164–67; Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, 96–97, 110–11.

9. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 69–101.

rives at the word on which all can unite at the Council of Nicaea; Antony can instruct pagans in their own philosophical terms (VC 3.3; VA 72–80).<sup>15</sup> In neither case is the “simplicity” or the ignorance real, or at least not for long. Its function in the text is to provide a foil for the enlightenment that both achieve, and through which each is able to teach and enlighten others.<sup>16</sup>

Again, demons: Antony is plagued and tormented by demons, but learns to overcome them and cast them out, for the demons are part of the scenario of ascent and enlightenment.<sup>17</sup> They appear in many other authors and were destined to become a classic motif in Greek ascetic works. But Constantine, too, is surrounded by demons, in the shape of pagan gods in the temples and idols, which he removes or destroys, and in the form of his enemy Licinius, who is depicted as the writhing serpent in the picture on the imperial palace (VC 3.3; Eusebius does not allow us to miss the allusion). The tetrarchs, Eusebius says, “enslaved . . . all their subjects to the deceits of evil demons” (1.13.3). Demons stir up dissent and division in the Church (VC 1.45.2; cf. VA 9, “the enemy who despises the good”), and the building of Constantine’s Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem triumphs over “the whole tribe of demons” (3.26.1; cf. 26.3, “the demon Aphrodite”). Both Constantine and Antony are subjected to trial and are able to surmount it with God’s help. In both works, pagan oracles (the “oracles of the Greeks”; VA 33), defended by Porphyry in his work *On Philosophy from Oracles*, are the token and abode of demons.<sup>18</sup> In the *Life of Constantine*, as in Eusebius’s *Tricennalian Oration*, the pagan gods in their oracular abodes are both demons and “dead idols,” who make no protest when Constantine’s men carry them off and strip their treasure (VC 3.26.3; 57; LC 7.13; 8; 9.8).

There are signs and wonders in the *Life of Constantine* just as there are in the *Life of Antony*. Chief among them is the vision of the Cross, added by Eusebius to his earlier account of the same campaign, on

which the narrative is otherwise heavily dependent, and quite different in nature, location and timing from any earlier story told by Lactantius or the Latin panegyrists. Constantine sees a vision of a Cross of light, with the words “In this conquer,” while somewhere on the campaign southwards through Italy, but before reaching Rome; it is followed by a dream in which Christ appears to him and orders him to construct a cross-shaped standard. The narrative here departs drastically from Eusebius’s otherwise very close dependence on his own earlier version at HE 9.<sup>19</sup> Constantine is not claimed to be a healer of the sick, as Antony frequently is. But like Antony he is a healer of disputes and of men’s error, bringing the medicine of God’s truth, an image that the emperor explicitly uses in his dealings with the Donatists.<sup>20</sup> For Eusebius, he is also marked out, not merely by his vision and dream, but also by other signs: “[H]e is the only one to whom God gave convincing proofs of the religion he practised by the benefits of every kinds which were accorded him.”<sup>21</sup> In the vision story, and the campaign against Licinius that follows it in the narrative, Constantine’s behavior and experience are explicitly patterned in Eusebius’s account on those of Moses when he sees God, receives the Law, and is told how to construct a tabernacle; so Constantine constructs his standard by divine teaching and builds a tabernacle on his military campaign so that victory will be granted by God.<sup>22</sup> The hero is protected by God and taught by him through signs so that he can in turn lead others to the truth.<sup>23</sup>

Teaching and debate are, in both works, the essential processes by which this education is imparted.<sup>24</sup> Antony is presented as teacher in long discourses on demons and with the pagans (VA 16–43; 74–80); he is much in demand for his teaching and advice, and his letter to the emperors is cited as an example of his wisdom.<sup>25</sup> He does not concentrate solely on his own spiritual well-being, but gains control

15. For tendentious reasons, Eusebius does not go into detail.

16. Cf. Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*, on Gnostic and Origenist enlightenment in Antony’s thought, and on the theme of ascent (Brakke, *Athanasius*, 217–26). Teaching by Constantine is a main theme in the *Life*, both in the reporting of his letters and edicts, and in its own right in the anecdotal material about Constantine and his court in bk. 4.

17. References: *Vie d’Antoine*, ed. Bartelink, 54–56; see also Brakke, *Athanasius*, 218–21; Louth, “St. Athanasius,” 507–8; Daniélou, “Démons de l’air dans la Vie d’Antoine.” Demons are a main theme of Antony’s first major address: VA 17–43.

18. The true oracles are the Scriptures: VC 1.38.4; 3.1.4, 3.

19. VC 1.28f.; see Hall, “Eusebian and Other Sources in Vita Constantini I.”

20. *Optatus*, App. 9; see also VC 2.59, 66, cf. 3. 64.1, 2.68.1.

21. VC 1.4.

22. VC 1.30–32; 2.7–12, esp. 12, on the tabernacle that Constantine constructed and used both on his campaign against Licinius, and, according to Eusebius, on his last campaign against the Persians (4.56).

23. For the theme of providential guidance, see Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 80.

24. Also in *V. Apoll.*; and cf. the wise man’s παροῖσία. Origen presented as a teacher: Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 90, 100.

25. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 213–14, plays down this side of Antony too far; it is not in fact incompatible with his presentation in terms of “simplicity.”

of his own desires in order to impart wisdom and direct others; his desert sojourns prepare him for encounters with outsiders and for necessary visits to the city in order to instruct the authorities and the people. He is conscious of his role as an exemplar to others, and is seen by them as a spiritual mentor. In the *Life of Constantine*, the depiction of the emperor as teacher is one of the more striking features, even if presented with a certain ambiguity, for Eusebius admits that he did not always manage to persuade his hearers.<sup>26</sup> Constantine would preach to his court, to their curiosity and embarrassment, his discourses taking the form of sermons about conversion and the likelihood of divine punishment for those who did not mend their ways. His letters, quoted or translated by Eusebius, like those preserved in the anti-Donatist *Appendix* of Optatus, or Constantine's own *Oration to the Saints*, are as much moral and personal harangues as statements of imperial policy. They show him as motivated by a powerful sense of duty and mission, and in no doubt as to his responsibility to lead others in the same direction. Constantine feels a divine calling to rescue the empire from tyranny, so that "the human race, taught by my obedient service, might restore the religion of the most dread Law" (VC 2.28.2).<sup>27</sup> His famous remark that he considered himself the "bishop of those outside" is interpreted by T. D. Barnes as a quip;<sup>28</sup> but it is admiringly reported by Eusebius and shows the emperor's sense of his own role as teacher. I doubt whether Constantine had much sense of humor. He is equally serious about his handling of Church councils and about his role at the Council of Nicaea, after which he writes to the churches to inform and instruct them of its decisions.<sup>29</sup>

Both Antony and Constantine address themselves to pagans. Antony debates with them directly, and the *Life* envisages an audience of pagans as well as Christians.<sup>30</sup> The same is probably true of the *Life of Constantine*, written for a cultivated audience much like the

26. VC 4.29; Constantine's zeal for the instruction of others lasted to the end of his life: 4.55.

27. Constantine's letters relating to the Donatist controversy, preserved in Optatus's *Appendix*, display this sense of personal duty and mission already in the months after his victory in 312.

28. VC 4.24, on which see Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 270.

29. VC 3.17–20; final address to the departing bishops: 3.21; letters to those not present: 3.22.

30. VA 94; asked for by western monks: *pref.*

courtiers who listened to the emperor's sermons.<sup>31</sup> It is claimed that Antony allowed "Greeks" (i.e., pagans), to come to him for healing, and that they were often converted as a result (VA 70). In the *Life*, Constantine's mission to pagans is to lead them from error; in this he is likened to Moses, who brought his people from slavery; so Constantine freed the empire from the tyrants and led it to the truth of the faith (VC 1.12, 26, 38–39). He also debates the superiority of Christianity over paganism; he writes in his letter to the East about the error of polytheism and the false oracles that issue forth from the tripods of Apollo (2.50). It is also his duty to overthrow idols, and Eusebius records the destruction of temples (few, admittedly) in this vein; the Cilician Aesculapeum, "the vaunted wonder of the noble philosophers," was razed to the ground (3.56.2), and the destruction of shrines "everywhere" "might well be regarded, he says, as among the Emperor's greatest achievements" (3.57, 3.68.1).<sup>32</sup> In practical terms, Constantine could not outlaw paganism and did not try; but, like the *Tricennialian Oration*, the *Life* nonetheless presents him in the guise of one who overthrew idolatry. The building of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher at Jerusalem, for example, represents not only the honoring of Christ's tomb but also the overthrow of paganism; the site was first cleared of a temple that had been built there after the Jewish war under the influence of demons (VC 3.26.1), and that was the home, as Eusebius puts it, of "the impure demon Aphrodite," "a terrible and truly genuine tomb" (3.26.3). Later, and implausibly, he claims that Constantine purged the new city of Constantinople of "all idol-worship, so that nowhere in it appeared those images of the supposed gods which are worshipped in temples . . . nor feasts of demons" (3.48.2).

Orthodoxy—even if conceived of from opposing positions—is a major concern of both *Lives*. The *Life of Antony* is preoccupied with the attack on heresy and schism, especially Arianism. Antony has no converse with Melitians or Manichees and is angered by any mention of Arians (VA 68–69, 89);<sup>33</sup> he comforts his fellow monks when

31. For which see VC 4.29; his discourses included denunciations of polytheism. He prescribed a monotheistic prayer for his non-Christian soldiers (4.19), enjoined Sunday observance on all, and had his own household run by Christian clerics (4.18).

32. The removal of temple treasures by Constantine's officers is also a major theme of the *Tricennialian Oration*.

33. But Antony is accused of agreeing with the Arians himself, and he goes to Alexandria to clear himself: VA 69.

they are dismayed at Arian success, telling them that the Arians are inspired by demons and the devil, and as senseless as mules, and that their power will soon pass. On another occasion, he writes to reprove an official who was pro-Arian and anti-orthodox; the man is bitten by a horse and quickly dies (82, 86).<sup>34</sup> But Constantine, too, is presented as the guardian of orthodoxy—not without some difficulty, as Eusebius has to confront the issue of his own equivocal behavior before, during and after the Council of Nicaea, and the later apparent reversal of imperial policy toward Arius and his supporters; characteristically for Eusebius, and for hagiography generally, he chooses the technique of omission.<sup>35</sup> In the *Life*, Constantine is the peacemaker in the Church; disputes are attributed to the working of the spirit of envy, otherwise the devil. The emperor is shocked by dissension, which can only be the result of “envy” (VC 2.61.2), and which he takes as a personal calamity (2.63), and works to bring back peace in the Church. He calls the disputes in Africa “an intolerable madness” caused by “ill-considered frivolity” (2.66.1). The quarrels in Egypt disturb the emperor’s own equanimity: “Give me back, therefore, peaceful days and undisturbed nights, so that I too may still have some pleasure left in the clear light and happiness of a quiet life” (2.72.1). Constantine’s letter to the Council of Tyre exiling Athanasius, which is quoted by Eusebius, gives the bishops full authority to deal with the matter and asks them to relieve his own anxiety and restore the blessing of peace (4.42.5). This was particularly sensitive, in that Athanasius and others had been recalled from exile after Constantine’s death and before the final stages of composition of the *Life*.<sup>36</sup> Eusebius has his own agenda, as doubtless does the original author of the *Life of Antony*. Yet in presenting their subjects in this tendentious way, both writers lie at the start of a long hagiographic

34. Heresy and schism in the VA: *Vie d’Antoine*, ed. Bartelink, 59–61.

35. Eusebius had gone to the Council of Nicaea under condemnation by a church council for Arian sympathies. In his account, the doctrinal issues discussed at Nicaea are passed over as quickly as possible in favor of extended treatment of the dispute about the date of Easter (VC 3.5, 14, 17–20); a letter from Constantine to Arius and Alexander is reported at 2.64–72, but Arius’s name is avoided in the main text. The reason for the Council of Tyre, which exiled Athanasius for his support of Nicaea, is given as “the spirit of envy,” to which the Arian controversy had also been ascribed (4.41; 2.61).

36. For detailed discussion, see Cameron, “Eusebius’s *Vita Constantini*.”

tradition, in which it was the undoubted role of the holy man or saint to resist and overcome wrong belief and to proclaim the truth.

Both Constantine and Antony are deferential to the Church, and their zeal for orthodoxy is combined with respect for the Church’s institutions and its bishops.<sup>37</sup> Their obedience to God’s call is also emphasized (VA 3, 66); when they are given signs, they recognize what they must do. Like Moses, Constantine has to be taught by God; but, like Moses also, he obeys.

The physical appearance of a Christian hero is one of the ways in which his special role can be discerned. Thus Antony’s face is bright and shining with cheerfulness (67).<sup>38</sup> His strength survives into old age, despite the rigors of his asceticism, and he is healthier and more energetic than those who have not engaged in austerities (93). Similarly, when seen by Eusebius at the Council of Nicaea, Constantine looked like a heavenly angel of God, shining with brightness (VC 3.10.3), and his outward appearance seemed to Eusebius to testify to the radiance of his soul (10.4). In his last years, his body was still “sound and unimpaired, free from any defect and more youthful than any young man’s” (4.52.4); he surpassed Alexander the Great in the length of his life and the size of his empire (1.7). The Greek *Life* of Antony describes him on his return from his ascetic withdrawal as being like a mystic initiate (VA 14);<sup>39</sup> again, Constantine is seen by Eusebius in the same light, especially at his baptism: “Constantine was initiated by rebirth in the mysteries of Christ, and exulted in the Spirit on being given the divine seal” (VC 4.62.4).<sup>40</sup>

Just as the holy man as teacher leaves behind him the legacy of his influence, so the two *Lives* themselves offer models for imitation.<sup>41</sup> Thus Antony taught his fellow monks and bequeathed both a literal inheritance in his sheepskins and cloak and his instructions about his burial, and a spiritual legacy in the form of his teachings and example, especially his instruction in the ascetic life and his warnings against heresy (VA 91); Constantine left behind his own mausoleum,

37. See Brakke, *Athanasius*, 245–48. For the VC, see, e.g., 2.65.2; 3.60.2; 3.20.1.

38. Cf. Prov. 15.13, and David at 1 Sam. 16.12, and see Louth, “St. Athanasius,” 506.

39. Noted by Barnes, “Angel of Light,” as a difference between the Greek and the Syriac versions, the latter having him look like an angel; see also Louth, “St. Athanasius,” 508.

40. VC 4.62.4.

41. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 258–62.

where he was to be symbolically buried with the apostles (VC 4.58),<sup>42</sup> and according to Eusebius, he miraculously lived on in his sons as though he were still alive (1.1; 4.71). The death of the hero is an important element in such *Lives*, and the deaths of Constantine and of Antony are recounted with solemnity and emphasis on their exemplary and edifying nature; of Antony it is said that "even his death has become something imitable" (VA 89). Constantine's death, with its antecedents and his obsequies, occupies a substantial part of the final book of the *Life* (VC 4.61–75). Both subjects know when their death is approaching. Constantine's illness is followed by baptism, which is far from being, as has so often been wrongly assumed, a late and therefore hesitant or calculating decision, but quite the opposite, namely, the culmination of his presentation as a Christian hero; after it, he puts away imperial pomp and the military action on which he was engaged and devotes his mind wholly to God (4.62–63).

More than the *Life of Antony*, the *Life of Constantine* is generally read as a historical text, and it is often blamed for its lack of honesty and reliability. The debate as to its literary form is generally conducted in terms of genre (rhetorical panegyric or history) rather than purpose. But as always, Eusebius has a lesson in mind, and that has overridden questions of genre, just as it has dictated the manner and style of writing. Rather than judge the *Life* as if it were a sober attempt at an objective history of Constantine, we should read it as the life of a holy man, with the difference, of course, that this holy man is also an emperor. Read in that way, it is far closer to the *Life of Antony* and subsequent Christian *Lives* than it has usually seemed.

Pagan *Lives* such as Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* or Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* have received a vast amount of attention in recent years, certainly enough to make certain common characteristics clear.<sup>43</sup> They tend (like the *Lives* of Constantine and Antony) to reflect fluid situations, whereas the later form of hagiography soon developed a more clear-cut shape, even with variations of level and type. In the works that I have been considering, the hero is an individual,

42. Unfortunately, there is a lacuna at this point, but it is clear nevertheless that Eusebius describes the mausoleum, not a church; see Mango, "Constantine's Mausoleum and the Translation of Relics."

43. These are usefully summarized in Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist*. See Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, chs. 2 and 3; Bowersock, *Fiction as History*; Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*.

on the edge of change—not necessarily an outsider, but by definition one who does not quite fit society's mold. In order to exert influence (it is preferable to avoid the much abused term "power"), he undergoes some kind of training and discipline, from which he emerges the more potent. He is marked out for his role by special signs, which have to be interpreted and explained. He has an impact on others, by teaching or example, or by signs, or all of these. Wisdom, or special knowledge, is a main characteristic, and need not be (perhaps is usually not) wisdom of the conventional sort; hence the emphasis on "simplicity" pitched against worldly wisdom or cunning.

A common manifestation of the holy man's special knowledge is a formal debate (like Antony's, or like Constantine's interventions in doctrinal disputes) with allegedly wise opponents; Simon Magus is already one of these.<sup>44</sup> Despite ostensible appeals to simplicity, speeches, discourses, and letters are common ways of employing rhetoric to display the holy man's superiority; all of these are prominent in the *Lives* of Antony and Constantine, and indeed the many documents in the latter take the form of letters from the emperor, highly personal in tone. Miracles, healing, or at least special tokens are also required, as is the display of holiness. The hero has clients, or followers, for his role is to teach and to influence, and he has to overcome opponents or enemies, for what is at stake, and what is disputed, is authority. Hence the emphasis on orthodoxy and on the refutation of paganism.

These *Lives* are not innocent histories; they are didactic and apologetic works. The author of the *Life of Antony* is artful and sophisticated in his themes and his argument, and so is Eusebius in the *Life of Constantine*. If the latter could not quite squeeze Constantine into a mold of spirituality, he could and did present him as special, marked out for all to see by God's tokens and signs. Eusebius may already have been working on the *Life* when he delivered the *Tricennial Oration* in the emperor's presence in Constantinople;<sup>45</sup> the two works are superficially different, but in fact extremely close in vocabulary and ideas, and we can be sure that the message of the *Life* was quite deliberate, even though it is expressed in more concrete terms. That

44. For further discussion, see Edwards, "Epilogue: Biography and the Biographic," and see also Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, 94–96.

45. See Drake, "What Eusebius Knew."

message overall is one of authority and victory. Both works are pervaded by the imagery of trophies and signs that Eusebius uses for the Cross, the token of Constantine's victory and a theme shared by Athanasius and by the *Life of Antony*.<sup>46</sup> This is also why the *Life's* account of the Holy Sepulcher focuses on victory and resurrection, rather than on the suffering represented by Golgotha.<sup>47</sup> Contrary to the currently fashionable view,<sup>48</sup> Eusebius has not deliberately ignored the discovery of the True Cross (which, given his eagerness to promote Constantine's claims, would have been odd indeed), but focused his attention on the symbol of victory represented by the site of the resurrection. The *Life of Constantine* and the *Life of Antony* alike are highly political works;<sup>49</sup> but they also present *Lives* of exceptional and exemplary individuals. In writing about them, both Eusebius and Athanasius (the likely author of the *Life of Antony*) are endeavoring to create "narrative worlds," or "social discourse,"<sup>50</sup> that is, to present their subject in their own lights for the persuasion of others.

The two *Lives* belong in a chain of related writings. Eusebius seems not to have been particularly well read in classical works, though he had evidently had the essentials of a rhetorical education and certainly knew the component parts of a standard imperial encomium. The fact that Eusebius's style is florid and hard to translate is a further sign of the rhetorical pretensions displayed in the work's elaborate preface; in fact, Eusebius is a rhetorician through and through. Nevertheless, he is not particularly worried about whether his work is termed a history or "acts." While he calls it *ιστορία*, he also appeals to a different tradition by referring to the *πράξεις* of great men, and though he does not describe his work himself as a *Life*, he does locate it in that tradition by his use of Plutarch.<sup>51</sup> He certainly gave some thought to the nature of biographical writing in relation both to Ori-

gen and to Constantine.<sup>52</sup> He had inherited access to the library of Origen, and he was equally familiar with authors such as Philo and Clement.<sup>53</sup> But he was also conscious of pagan claims made for rivals to Jesus, and of pagan attempts to appropriate the Mosaic tradition. He had already tried an exemplary *Life* replete with divine signs and tokens, in his portrayal of Origen, whom Porphyry had also criticized; now, decades on, he had had plenty of time to reflect on another and ponder the religious and historical implications, as well as having experienced the political shifts of the later years of Constantine's rule and the months after the emperor's death. He does not venture to compare Constantine directly with Jesus in the formal rhetorical introduction to the *Life*, but he does so explicitly in the peroration;<sup>54</sup> the comparison is also there in his section on Origen, and the thought is present indirectly in the main body of the *Life of Constantine* through the comparison with Moses.<sup>55</sup> Providing a refutation of Porphyry and other pagan writers was a major preoccupation of his, whether he was dealing with oracles, Moses, or the *Life of Apollonius*, and it is still very much alive in the *Life of Constantine*.

Neither of the two *Lives* makes close or overt reference to similar works as literary models, not least because they both wish to set up a Christian alternative.<sup>56</sup> But they share very many of the basic elements I have outlined. Could the Greek *Life of Antony* possibly itself be an answer to the *Life of Constantine*? If Athanasius was the author, the idea is neither impossible nor ridiculous, though there is no direct evidence for it. If he was not the author, he was still very close to Antony, the monks, and the *Life*, and the work can only have been written by someone with intimate knowledge of his concerns.<sup>57</sup> The

46. Louth, "St. Athanasius," 507; the sign of the Cross as a talisman: VA 35; against demons: *De inc.* 29, 50; see Brakke, *Athanasius*, 222. Differences between the Greek and Syriac versions: Louth, *ibid.*

47. VC 3.25–40.

48. For which see, e.g., Drake, "Eusebius on the True Cross"; Rubin, "The Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Conflict between the Sees of Caesarea and Jerusalem."

49. For Athanasius "correcting" other or earlier views of Antony in order to present him as a model for his own views, see Brakke, *Athanasius*, 203.

50. *Ibid.*, 202.

51. Notably at VC 1.10, on which see Mortley, *The Idea of Universal History from Hellenistic Philosophy to Early Christian Historiography*, 175–81; Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*,

54. Eusebius uses the Plutarchan motif of drawing or painting a picture of his subject.

52. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 75, referring to his "musings on the historical boundaries of biographical characterization."

53. For the connection, see Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 81–104.

54. VC 4.72.

55. For Origen, see Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 86. Antony and Jesus: *Vie d'Antoine*, ed. Bartelink, 52.

56. For recent summaries of views on the literary form and models of the VA 62–67: Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*, 126–32; *id.*, "Christian Asceticism and the Emergence of the Monastic Tradition."

57. On Athanasius and asceticism, see Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria and the Ascetic Movement of His Time"; Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*. For limited contact between Athanasius and Antony himself, see Brakke, *Athanasius*, 203–5. For further discussion of the possible relationship between the two works, and for the politics of the years after Constantine's death, see Cameron, "Eusebius's *Vita Constantini*."



"real" Antony is as difficult to recover as the real Constantine.<sup>58</sup> His allegedly unlettered spirituality is a fine foil to Athanasius's sophistication, but is probably as one-sided a presentation as the Constantine of Eusebius's *Life*.

I have used the title "Form and Meaning" for this chapter, and to that I now return. It is possible to exaggerate the importance of identifying a literary form either for the *Life of Constantine* or for the *Life of Antony*. Each partially fits various genres, but not completely; each is a work in its own right. The form and the meaning, in fact, are inseparable. This does not mean that we should give up the attempt to discern recognizable genres in either the *Life of Constantine* or the *Life of Antony*. It would be helpful to know whether Eusebius consciously followed rhetorical handbooks, or whether the *Life of Antony* owes anything to pagan *Lives*. But neither work is a mechanical copying of textbook rules. Both are innovative, and the innovation in each case consists precisely in the creative adaptation and translation of existing patterns to new needs. I believe, with Pasquali, Winkelmann, Barnes and others, that Eusebius worked on the *Life of Constantine* over some time, and that its form changed as he went on; I do not, however, believe that there were two separable and distinct drafts, cobbled together, each with a discrete literary form, such that they can be clearly distinguished in the present text. The real Constantine lies beyond the text of the *Life*. As for Antony, the *Life of Antony* combines harangue, ideology, and narrative to such an extent that it is difficult to say where, if anywhere, the "real" Antony lies. That does not mean that in either case the search should be given up as entirely hopeless. But what I am advocating, finally—or rather, at this particular stage in our research—is that both *Lives* need to be considered, not as "sources," but as texts.

58. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 201 (not Athanasius's intention to describe the historical Antony); Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*; Dörries, *Vita Antonii als Geschichtsquelle*.

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## Antony as Teacher in the Greek *Life*

PHILIP ROUSSEAU

My chief intention in this chapter, as its title suggests, is to show that at least parts of the Greek *Life* present Antony as an active master of disciples: not simply as an exemplar worthy of imitation, either by those who knew him or by readers of the text, but rather as one who taught, in ways familiar to "philosophical" or neo-Pythagorean pedagogues of the age.<sup>1</sup> I shall then reflect on how one might relate such an argument to issues of authorship and textual reliability. Finally, and more briefly, I shall compare the Antony of the *Life* with the impression gained from the letters attributed to him.

### THE YOUNG ANTONY

Let us begin, therefore, with the text. It is necessary to examine first the account of Antony's own formation, since (as we might expect) it sets the tone for the whole biography.<sup>2</sup> In the opening chapter, famous statements are made: Antony was brought up in a Christian way (χριστιανικῶς) and did not learn "letters" (γράμματα)—partly, at least, because he did not wish to mix with other children (1.1–2).<sup>3</sup> Here the author is preparing his readers for an allusion to Jacob in Genesis 25.27, where, like Antony in the *Life*, the future Israel is called ἀπλαστός, "unaffected," because he withdrew from the sin-

1. Some have found it hard to defend the literary unity of the work: "None of the many different models suggested has been able to explain the entire structure of the *Vita* in a convincing manner" (Rubenson, *Letters of St Antony* [1990 (all page citations below are to this edition)], 130; see also Barnes, "Angel of Light or Mystic Initiate?" 367–68). For assistance in settling some textual difficulties, my thanks to Vivienne Gray and Georgia Frank.

2. Heussi, *Ursprung*, pp. 87–100, thought the account unconvincing; but see Hertling, "Studi storici," 23–24. The Syriac is another matter: see Abramowski, "Vertritt die syrische Fassung die ursprüngliche Gestalt der *Vita Antonii*?" 52.

3. References to the *Life* are placed in parentheses within the text. My translations are based on *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine*, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink.

ful company of his brother Esau.<sup>4</sup> The impression, developed later in the *Life*, is of self-possession or self-reliance, rather than of literal withdrawal.<sup>5</sup>

Antony was then converted to a specifically ascetic life by hearing Scripture read in church, especially Matthew 19.21—"go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."<sup>6</sup> We need not exaggerate the implication of the setting:<sup>7</sup> it is what Antony heard that matters in the context, not where he heard it. Inspired by the words of the Gospel, he left his home, rarely entered a church again, regarded Scripture as "sufficient," quite independent of the liturgy, and (echoing Deut. 4.9) "took heed for himself" (προσέχων ἑαυτῷ) (3.1).<sup>8</sup>

Like other scriptural echoes in the text, that allusion to Deuteronomy 4.9 is essential to the argument. "Now, Israel, listen to the statutes and laws which I am teaching you": thus the biblical chapter opens. If Israel learns to obey, the people will enter the promised land, "display [their] wisdom and understanding to other peoples" (the Septuagint uses σοφία and σύνεσις), reap praise from the enemy—"what a wise and understanding people!"—and (crucially) pass the wisdom on: "teach [συμβιβάσεις] [the things that you have seen with your own eyes] to your sons and to your sons' sons." This is no withdrawal, but the creation of a new people.<sup>9</sup> Its security and self-identity depend on an inherited culture, a carefully acquired understanding, and the transmission of both to those younger.

The final chapters in this section of the *Life* begin to hint at the intellectual labor on which that enterprise may have depended—

4. To translate ἄπλastos as "leading a settled life" is to take one's cue too much from "dwelling in tents" (for οἰκῶν οἰκίαν) and from the implications of Gen. 26.3, "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you."

5. For an Athanasian parallel to Jacob, as one who "withdrew and became alone," see Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 321. His judgment (254–55) that Antony was considered ἄπλastos because he remained "in an 'unformed' state of innate wisdom" is undermined by subsequent emphasis on Scripture and experience.

6. For the avoidance of allegory in relation to this passage, see Brakke, *Athanasius*, 255 n. 163.

7. Compare Brakke, *Athanasius*, 245. See also Ewa Wipszycka, "Conversion de sainte Antoine."

8. "Sufficient": τὰς μὲν γραφὰς ἱκανὰς εἶναι πρὸς διδασκαλίαν, 16.1. Cf. 46.6: ἐκ τῶν γραφῶν and πολλοῖς διδάσκαλος γένηται.

9. Note also God's promise to Antony in 10.3: ποιήσω σε ὀνομαστὸν πανταχοῦ γενέσθαι. Cf. God's promise to Jacob at Bethel, Gen. 28.14: "your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth . . . by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves."

demanding more than "elementary education in how to read and write."<sup>10</sup> Antony certainly seems to have written, and must therefore have been able to read. The allusion, in relation to his childhood, τοῖς ἀναγνώσμασι προσέχων (1.3), could mean that he *listened* to what *others* read (natural enough in a child); and that was certainly the case when he heard Scripture read in church (where the passive terms ἀναγινώσκεσθαι and ἀνάγνωσμα recur [2.3–4]). Once he embarked upon an ascetic life, however, an emphasis on his greater withdrawal makes listening less obvious. He learns "how necessary it is to pray constantly by oneself [κατ' ἰδίαν]," which seems less liturgically related (compared with 1.3 and 2.3–4) and may give a more active force to what follows at once, προσεῖχεν . . . τῇ ἀναγνώσει, "he applied himself to reading" (in the singular). True, the result was that "he let nothing of the things written [putting it literally: τῶν γεγραμμένων] fall to the ground," which refers almost certainly to Scripture; and the passage concludes: "he held fast to all of them, and memory took for him the place of books" (λοιπὸν αὐτῷ τὴν μνήμην ἀντὶ βιβλίων γίνεσθαι [3.7]). The least this implies is that Antony respects the Scriptures and commits them to memory; but it is in this alone that his freedom from "books" (which may mean *other* books) resides.

A scene presented in a later passage is more difficult to interpret. Invisible demons are said to "sing" psalms and "recall" passages from Scripture (25.1). The text immediately proceeds to describe similar embarrassments that afflict ascetics while they are either reading or, perhaps, listening (ἀναγινωσκόντων ἡμῶν [25.2]). However, the writer does not appear to envisage a liturgical or even a public situation. The structure of the sentence forms a unity, and runs as follows: "[T]hey themselves [the demons] often repeat at once, like an echo, what has been read [ταῦτα . . . ἅπερ ἀνέγνωσται], and often too they rouse us to prayer while we sleep; and they do this all the time, scarcely allowing us to sleep at all." The setting evoked is of solitary activity.<sup>11</sup>

The related issue of Antony's letter-writing is raised by a later story: the emperors write to him; he is reluctant to accept the letters, but eventually "allowed them to be read" (ἐπέτρεπεν ἀναγινώσκεσθαι);

10. Rubenson, *Letters of St Antony*, 141.

11. In translating 3.7, Bartelink is ambiguous—"attentif à la lecture"—but fully committed at 25.2—"lorsque nous lisons . . . ce qui a été lu."

and then, much less ambiguously, “he wrote in reply” (ἀντέγραψεν [81.1–5]). One has to admit, of course, that uncertainty remains. Unfortunately, apart from a vague phrase in 41.3, these are the only passages in which the ἀνάγνωσις vocabulary occurs—except for the concluding exhortations in 94.1–2, where the command ἀνάγνωτε can mean only “read.” One has to admit also that Antony is at least portrayed as rejecting the traditional role of an exegetical philosopher. The contrast was, indeed, with pagan practice. “The use,” writes Samuel Rubenson, “of the expression ‘to learn letters’ (γράμματα μαθεῖν) . . . is connected with the important dichotomy throughout the text between Hellenistic philosophy and mythology on the one hand and the Christian faith on the other.”<sup>12</sup> However, when the “Hellenes” are said to “leave their own land and cross the sea to study letters [ἵνα γράμματα μάθωσιν],” the travel is rejected as much if not more than the γράμματα. Ascetics, like Jacob (once again), were not ignorant but settled (20.4).<sup>13</sup> Whatever judgment about “letters” we may come to in the end, it was on the basis of a new culture, a new pattern of learning, that Antony made ready for his πρῶτον ἄθλον, his first confrontation with the powers of evil (7.1).

#### THE FORMING OF THE ASCETIC MASTER

The social character of the experience is immediately made apparent. Later, in chapter 14, we have the famous phrase about the desert becoming a monastic city (ἡ ἔρημος ἐπολίσθη μοναχῶν), and an emphasis on the numbers that embraced to τὸν μονήρη βίον (14.7); but in this earlier series of anecdotes, the devil launches his attack for precisely the same reason, “fearing that [Antony] would soon build in the desert a city of asceticism” (τὴν ἔρημον πολίση τῆς ἀσκήσεως [8.2]). Even before this, Antony had been surrounded by a circle of admirers—πολλοὶ μὲν ἐθαύμαζον (7.5). Now, having been beaten by demons, he was carried back from the tomb where he had lodged to

12. Rubenson, *Letters of St Antony*, 142. See Russell, *Plutarch*, 64: “Philosophy, as Plutarch knew it, was a scholarly business, much concerned with the interpretation of texts.”

13. 44.4 alludes to the οἴκοι of Jacob (Num. 24.5), and note ὡς εἰς ἴδιον οἶκον in 71.3. John of Lycopolis made a similar point, *Historia monachorum* 1 (Latin PL 21: 397AB; Greek, ed. Festugière (1.20), p. 16).

be watched over by relatives and others—“the people from the village” (οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς κώμης [8.4]).

When he then entered an abandoned barrack block, for his long induction into the mysteries of asceticism, he was constantly visited by persons known to him (οἱ γνώριμοι [13.1 and 7]). He carried on conversations with those invisible admirers (12.4, 13.1 and 4f.), and it was they who eventually forced him to emerge “as if from some temple, like an initiate of the mysteries, possessed by the god” (ὥσπερ ἔκ τινος ἁδύτου μεμυσταγωγημένος καὶ θεοφορούμενος [14.2, repeating 12.4]).<sup>14</sup> In this phase of his life, therefore, Antony was faced with a known group, ἄλλων τε γνωρίμων ἐλθόντων, ready-made for instruction and discipleship (14.2). He crossed the Arsinoë canal in company “with those who were with him” (οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ [15.1; see also 46.3, 60.3]). In his new settlement, many μοναστήρια sprang up, acknowledging him as their “father” (πατὴρ) (15.3).

An ascetic society had decided, in other words, to buckle down with Antony and face the hard and lasting task of self-improvement in his company and under his influence. He had said himself, some time before, that one should not blanch at the time required for ascetic progress or trust in mere withdrawal: one was dedicated to a path of labor (7.10).<sup>15</sup> Hence his well-known advice to start each day as if one were a beginner (7.11, 16.3, 55.7). The result of this “long haul” was the survival of an established community, bound together by constant dialogue, “consoled by their trust in one another” (54.7).<sup>16</sup> It was the group that was now self-possessed, “like country set apart, a place of piety and justice” (ὥσπερ χώραν τινὰ καθ’ ἑαυτὴν οὖσαν θεοσεβείας καὶ δικαιοσύνης). Its self-possession was cemented by mutual love (44.2–3). Within such a group, communication was essential: Antony, perhaps naturally shy to be seen eating, would even so eat with the brothers “often” (πολλάκις), so that he might more easily talk to them (45.4). They were to be equally open to the scru-

14. For Reitzenstein on μεμυσταγωγημένος, see Brakke, *Athanasius*, 242–43, Bartelink, *Vie*, 169 n. 1, and Rubenson, *Letters of St Antony*, 130. Barnes, “Angel of Light,” 360–62, 367, and Barrow, *Plutarch and His Times*, 76, 107, are helpful. Portrayal of Elijah as a revealer of mysteries shows the variety of traditions abroad in Egypt: see Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 76.

15. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 107, reads too much into πόθος καὶ τῇ προαιρέσει—“in a manner that was morally responsible and attentive to the unity of the Church.”

16. This passage and 7.11 are linked by the Stoic notion of προκοπή, progress: see Russell, *Plutarch*, 88–89.

tiny of others, and even write down their thoughts, as if addressing their companions (ἔστω οὖν ἡμῖν τὸ γράμμα ἀντὶ ὀφθαλμῶν τῶν συνασκητῶν [55.12]). When Antony returned south, having braved the persecution of Maximin Daia, many of the old group reassembled (50.4, 7); and, while seeking greater seclusion in his “inner mountain” (49.7), Antony regularly visited them (54.10) to share in the candor proper to a father and his sons (66.7–8).<sup>17</sup>

That social setting made a teaching role natural and inevitable. We might explain on that count the reputed anxiety of Athanasius: his supposed wish to exclude from his ideal Church, or at least to tame, any ascetics who laid claim to such authority. David Brakke writes of the patriarch’s “suspicion of academic Christianity,” that is to say, “the understanding of Christianity as a philosophy, centred around the study of ancient writings under the guidance of an academically trained teacher.”<sup>18</sup> Antony, of course, is not presented in quite those terms; but he is more than an “ideal human being.”<sup>19</sup> So simple a distinction between articulate reflection (rendered suspect) and an exemplary life (recommended) was not available at the time. The first sign of a more complex vocation comes when Antony lodges in his fort. He shouts through the door, offering advice and encouragement to those who visit him (13.4f.). His recommendation of the sign of the Cross as a protective gesture, for example, does not make his counsel any less of an instruction: for the appreciation of effect can be as demanding intellectually as the understanding of a cause. Thus the text prepares us for subsequent distinctions. Having emerged “as one initiated into sacred mysteries” (μεμυσταγωγημένος), Antony is presented, not only as a healer and an exorcist, but also as one en-

17. This “new beginning” may point to a change of source or a different tradition: Antony’s original conversion and his first confrontation with demons are echoed in 49.2–5 and 51.2–5.

18. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 254. For Athanasius’s opposition to Hieracas—to “a social form of Christianity in which free academic discussion of doctrine thrived”—see *ibid.*, 57–65, and, for other narrow uses of the term *academic*, 202, 254, 261, 270. Hieracas is discussed in Epiphanius *Pan.* 67. For other such figures, see Frankfurter, *Elijah*, 96–100. Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity*, 21, comments effectively on Eusebius *Historia ecclesiastica* 7.24.6 (συγκαλέσας τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους καὶ διδασκάλους τῶν ἐν ταῖς κόμαις ἀδελφῶν).

19. In Brakke’s words, *Athanasius*, 200. “Athanasius defines Antony’s authority in moral terms; the monk’s life is a pattern to be imitated and, as such, contributes to the formation of the πολιτεία that characterizes the united Church” (*ibid.*, 203). Similar contrasts occur at 202, 213–14, 245, 270. Frankfurter, *Elijah*, 110, makes a comparable distinction between teacher and exemplar.

dowed with “charm in speaking” (χάριν τε ἐν τῷ λαλεῖν [14.6]). A later passage repeats the conjunction: “[T]hose who were suffering received even the words of the old man as a cure” (ὡς θεραπείαν ἐδέχοντο καὶ τοὺς λόγους τοῦ γέροντος [56.2]). There is a link made also between his verbal engagement with others (διαλεγόμενος [14.7; 15.3]) and the creation of the “desert city.” He taught the value of ἀγάπη and assured his audience of God’s φιλανθρωπία (14.6–7). An ascetic society formed around him “drawn together by his word” (ἐλκοντος τοῦ λόγου, a very forceful expression [15.3]).

#### THE ADDRESSES TO MONKS

Antony began his great address to the monks because they hoped “to hear him say something” (ἀκοῦσαι παρ’ αὐτοῦ λόγον), and so “he spoke to them” (ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς [16.1]). When he said that the Scriptures were sufficient “for our instruction” (πρὸς διδασκαλίαν), it was for “instruction” (16.1). The purpose of the discourse was mutual and verbal encouragement: “It is good for us to encourage one another in the faith and invigorate ourselves in conversation” (παρακαλεῖν ἀλλήλους ἐν τῇ πίστει, καὶ ἀλείφειν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις [*ibid.*]). The discussion moved quickly to traditional “philosophical” topics—the relations between time and eternity, the transitoriness of wealth and success, the definition of true virtue (16–20).

This may seem a mere accumulation of disjointed phrases; but the thrust of the text as a whole is that the “conversational” aspect of Antony’s career was the principal constituent of ascetic society. His teaching demanded a sharing of information. The “children” were to speak to their father, telling him what they knew (λέγοντες εἴ τι οἶδατε), and Antony, as one older in years, would share with them in turn “what I know and what I have experienced” (ὃ οἶδα καὶ ὧν πεπείραμαι [16.2]). A later chapter makes the same point, again with the phrase “I speak as if to my children” (ὡς τέκνοις λέγω [22.4]). Of course, imitation is included (27.1), and Antony laid claim to the status of spiritual master because he was himself experienced (22.4, 33.4). Words were not enough, he said, unless hearers could be assured that they sprang from one’s own efforts and genuine success (39.1). Yet the assertion was made amid words; the long address ends: “As Antony discussed these things, they all rejoiced” (ταῦτα διαλεγόμενου τοῦ Ἀντωνίου πάντες ἔχαιρον [44.1]); and the audience was

prompted to further discussion (44.2).<sup>20</sup> All this must be borne in mind when one comes upon a distinction between λόγος and διήγημα on the one hand and γνῶσις on the other, as if all λόγοι were rejected: the goal was to advance to perception and insight, διάκρισις and διορατική (21.5, 22.3, 34.1f.; and see 59.6, 66.1).

During the second period of Antony's withdrawal, the emphases in the text remain the same: "His words were welcoming" (ἐξένιζεν αὐτοὺς τοῖς λόγοις) (54.6). The second discourse, like the first, contains passages of traditional philosophical moment—most remarkably, on the location and passage of the soul (66.2f.). The candor of a father with his children is again recommended: Antony could not bring himself to hide from them his visions; and here the "disclosure" (τὸ διήγημα) is regarded as a worthy aid ἐκείνοις δὲ γίνεται τὸ διήγημα πρὸς ὠφέλειαν [66.7–8]). In the closing chapters, he teaches still: "He would discuss the implications [of earlier reflections] with the brothers in his company" (ὠμίλει τὰ ἀκόλουθα τοῖς συνοῦσιν ἀδελφοῖς αὐτῷ [82.2]); "[H]e taught them [ἐδίδασκεν] . . . analyzing [again, διηγούμενος] the villainy and weakness of possessing spirits" (88.1).<sup>21</sup>

#### ANTONY AND THE PHILOSOPHERS

The most striking passages in this second part of the *Life*—passages that have been most made use of in the portrayal of Antony as an anti-intellectual—concern his confrontation with pagan philosophers. There is, certainly, a concrete quality to Antony's declarations: he suspects argument for its own sake. That does not, however, make him dependent merely on some inner, natural assurance: Christianity has a wise and explicit discourse of its own. The contrast is with the cleverness of the "outsiders," a wisdom that is "worldly" in that sense (93.4).<sup>22</sup> So his debate with the philosophers is about method, about the pathway to true knowledge. There is no doubt that γράμματα are being exposed to criticism of some sort, like λόγοι elsewhere, and that

20. Bartelink is narrow in translating φιλολογούντων as "lisant les Écritures." VP/G, 58, describes a wholly similar pattern.

21. Gregory of Nazianzus may have been referring to the *Life* itself with his phrase ἐν πλάσματι διηγήσεως (Orat. 21.5).

22. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 253, 256–58, has misunderstood ἡ ἔξωθεν σοφία, which means simply "pagan." This point, and the whole incident, is explored by Rubenson, "Philosophy and Simplicity," chapter 5 of this volume.

a "natural" quality is held up for admiration.<sup>23</sup> That does not mean we have to drive Antony into a corner, where language, argument, and instruction have no place. A careful reading of the chapters concerned will show us why.

We know from earlier passages of the *Life* that Antony is not being described in sweeping terms as lacking any education at all. In the phrase γράμματα μὴ μαθὼν, literally, "not learning letters" (72.1), a special meaning is attached to γράμματα—a restriction that applies to much of the vocabulary in the dialogues that follow. When Antony says, for example, that the philosophers should imitate him—δεῖ γὰρ τὰ καλὰ μιμεῖσθαι (72.4)—he means them to share more fully in qualities they acknowledge, since he is indeed συνετός and φρόνιμος (ibid.). Argument, therefore, will be about the definition of those words.<sup>24</sup>

With a second group of pagans, Antony adopts a different approach: for they come to mock him (χλευάζειν [73.1]). In this antagonistic context, a distinction arises between νοῦς and γράμματα—a distinction set up by Antony himself in order to trap his opponents. His coup de grâce takes the side of νοῦς, endowing it with healing power. Γράμματα are not dismissed, but reserved, by implication, for those yet to be healed: "to him whose health of mind is assured, letters are unnecessary" (ὃ τοίνυν ὁ νοῦς ὑγιαίνει, τούτῳ οὐκ ἀναγκαῖα τὰ γράμματα [73.2–3]).

Then a third party arrives, equally disdainful (χλευάζειν again), asking why one should want to be a Christian, and in particular outraged by the Cross (74.2). Antony sets up another distinction, one in relation to which he knows the pagans cannot win: would they prefer the Cross or the adulteries of mythology? Other dilemmas follow: does God lift up humanity or descend to the level of the animals; should one be optimistic about human nature or pessimistic (74.4–10)? In all this, he uses merely the etiquette of public debate, the jibes and ploys that were standard at the time—indeed, much in this section refers to the common techniques of ascetic and philosophical formation in the late antique world.<sup>25</sup>

It is, as I say, at the level of method that criticism is most brought to

23. Rubenson, *Letters of St Antony of St Antony*, 133–35.

24. See Lim, *Public Disputation*, 48, on Iamblichus and Eunapius, and the discussion in my *Pachomius*, 162–69.

25. For Antony's "philosophical brilliance" as an innate quality, see Brakke,

bear on λόγοι. It is what you do with words, how you use them, that raises problems. Antony's distinction here is between ἡ δι' ἐνεργείας πίστις, "an active faith," and ἡ διὰ λόγων ἀπόδειξις, "verbal proof" (77.3). What is contrasted with λόγος is ἐνέργεια, while ἀπόδειξις gives way to πίστις (see also 77.5–6; 80.7).<sup>26</sup> The section ends with a continuing faith in νοῦς—ἃ νοοῦμεν—although it is a knowledge that cannot always be put into words (77.6). Λόγος and νοῦς, therefore, are not abandoned, but rescued from sophistry and incorporated into a larger system of understanding, a more complex methodology, symbolized most of all by πίστις (rather than σοφία or γνῶσις). The pagan philosophers are συλλογιζόμενοι καὶ σοφίζόμενοι ("you with your syllogisms and sophisms"), while Antony and his followers are πίστιν διδάσκοντες ("teaching faith" [78.3]).

Antony's associated admiration of God's visible effect upon the world—miracles of healing, and miracles of courage and conviction (79.5–6, 80.4–6)—was not a rejection of perception, but the traditional acknowledgment of God's essential obscurity: one did not fight one's way to understanding by ἀπόδειξις, but took one's cue from the evident ἐνέργεια of God within the world. Antony's question shows that there was in this no abandonment of the mind's effort: "How do we understand things precisely [πῶς ἀκριβῶς διαγινώσκειται]," he asks, "especially knowledge about God [ἡ περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ γνῶσις]?" (77.3). Γνῶσις here gains from ἀκριβῶς all the rigor we could wish for. An exhortation to read is also maintained. "I feel strongly," says Antony, "that you are doing a great wrong, and that you have not really engaged with our scriptures; but do get to grips with them and see [ἐντύχετε . . . καὶ βλέπετε] that what Christ did proves him [ἀποδείκνυσιν] to be God dwelling [among us] for the salvation of humanity" (75.4). Here Antony redefines the vocabulary of demonstration and recommends to his visitors a program of study calculated to call upon all their powers of application and insight. They leave his company exactly as monks had left him before: "They admitted he had helped them" (ὁμολογοῦντες ὠφελεῖσθαι παρ' αὐτοῦ [80.7]).

*Athanasius*, 214, 255. Plutarch supplies an important paradigm, Russell, *Plutarch*, 69. Cf. Russell's "bookish conversations," 43–44, with Lim's "intimate collegiality," *Public Disputation*, 19. Lim helps to place Antony within a wider tradition, 31–69.

26. For background, see Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.* 21.4, together with Barrow, *Plutarch*, 78; Lim, *Public Disputation*, 8–9; and Smith, "Iamblichus' Views on the Relationship of Philosophy to Religion in *De mysteriis*," 77–80.

## ANTONY AND THE CLERGY

It is difficult to see how the passages cited, properly understood, can be said to call into question Antony's mastery of pedagogical technique. Similarly, his encounters with the clergy display a marked independence. There is ambiguity in the report of Antony's visit to Alexandria in A.D. 338: Athanasius, oddly, does not appear; and Antony travels at the invitation of "both the bishops and all the brethren" (παρά τε τῶν ἐπισκόπων καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν πάντων [69.2]). More remarkable is the fact that, even there in Alexandria, "he taught the people" (ἐδίδασκέ τε τὸν λαόν [69.3]). An earlier foray into the Delta, during the persecution by Maximin Daia, seems to have been equally an ascetic initiative, not one designed to support a clerically controlled resistance.<sup>27</sup> The chief outcome of the trip was Antony's disappointed realization that he was not destined for martyrdom: the encouragement he brought others was a more valued gift. The *Life* is explicit in its explanation: "The Lord was keeping him safe to aid us and others, so that he might, for many, be a teacher of the asceticism he himself had learned from the scriptures" (ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀσκήσει, ἣν αὐτὸς ἐκ τῶν γραφῶν μεμάθηκεν, πολλοῖς διδάσκαλος γένηται [46.6]).<sup>28</sup>

In passages where the *Life* discusses more generally Antony's relations with priests and other clerics, a similar independence emerges.<sup>29</sup> We are alerted accordingly to possible associations with other less "clerical" texts from Egypt;<sup>30</sup> associations to keep in mind, when we read how Antony deferred to the canons of the Church, how he wished to be honored below the clergy, how he bowed his head to bishops and priests (67.2): for cautious tact in the face of power is not

27. The pagan δικαστής is made to recognize that he was dealing with a party of "monks" (παρήγγειλε μηδένα τῶν μοναχῶν ἐν τῇ δικαστηρίῳ φαίνεσθαι [46.3]). That usage, however, reflects the period when the text was written: more telling is the reference to "companions"—αὐτοῦ τε καὶ τῶν σὺν αὐτῷ (46.3).

28. The "failure" to achieve martyrdom, if factual, might have demanded of Antony a fresh analysis of his destiny, not least in relation to admirers and dependants (as in 46.6). See Hertling, "Studi storici," 24.

29. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 213, writes of Antony's "obedience to the Church's clergy"; but the passages he alludes to are either ambiguous or open to other interpretations. See also *ibid.*, 110, "it was the monk who submitted to the bishop" (on the basis of 67.1–3).

30. The apocalyptic text examined by Frankfurter, *Elijah*, 21, "shows no specific interest, positive or negative, in Alexandrian ecclesiastical hierarchy or authority; and there are no reflections of (purely) theological disputes." The *Life of Antony* is less neutral, but presents much that is comparable.

equivalent to submission. The biographies of Pachomius show how ascetics could simultaneously admire Athanasius and maintain some distance from the clerical order.<sup>31</sup> Deacons were handled with similar care. Antony and one such visitor effected a bargain: the deacon led the prayer, but Antony gave the advice. He engaged in dialogue with clerics, as with his own disciples; but only if they had something useful to say (εἴ τι χρήσιμόν τις ἔλεγεν [67.3]). His attitude to the Church generally was inspired by unwavering faith and piety; but his distaste for heretics was a matter of ἄσκησις: their company was harmful to the soul (βλάβην καὶ ἀπώλειαν εἶναι ψυχῆς [68.1]).

#### THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE *LIFE*

I would like now to discuss the implications of my analysis in relation to the question of the authorship of the *Life*. With a few exceptions (which we cannot, however, dismiss out of hand), most scholars attribute the work to Athanasius. If what I have said so far is to any degree acceptable, then either Athanasius must have been more amenable to ascetic teaching than some have supposed or we have to look for some other more sympathetic biographer. A man who apparently conducted himself as I think the text suggests was no mere rustic, no recluse, no uneducated boor. The *Life of Antony* is about many things, and about many things other than those touched upon here; but it does not consistently and exclusively portray the man as a stranger to, or not entitled to, the role of teacher. So, if Athanasius was the author of the *Life*, we shall have to revise our estimate of him as well.

Athanasius would have written in Greek: so disputes about authorship are inevitably intertwined with discussions about the priority of the existing Greek text. Faith in the priority of the Greek *Life* does not demand, of course, that Athanasius be its author; but, if such faith could be disturbed, there might be added reason for excluding him. René Draguet's publication of the Syriac version in 1980 heralded precisely such a program.<sup>32</sup> Draguet suggests that the Syriac reveals an earlier Greek version, different from our existing Greek text, and

31. See VP/Bo 28 and VP/G 27–30.

32. The collection *Antonius magnus eremita*, ed. Steidle, sums up the confidence of an older generation (e.g., Hertling, "Studi storici," 15). For the Syriac edition, see Draguet, *La vie primitive de s. Antoine conservée en syriaque*; summary and comments by Abramowski, "Syrische Fassung," 47.

significantly influenced by Coptic. That line of argument is carried a stage further by Timothy Barnes, who boldly affirms his belief in a Coptic original, drawn up for Pachomian monks in the Thebaid. The Syriac version provides an impression of what that Coptic was like. The existing Greek text, in Barnes's view, is an adaptation of the Coptic version for a more cultured audience; an adaptation that "subtly alters the emphasis and sometimes the content of the original in order to make it more palatable or attractive to the urban culture of the Greco-Roman world." It is unlikely that Athanasius was its author.<sup>33</sup>

If such a view were tenable, it might make the presentation of (among other things) Antony the teacher part of an "un-Athanasian" address to a new audience, part of a different and subsequent ascetic program. General opinion is resistant, however. Few would now rally to Draguet's cause without extensive qualification. Outright skepticism has been voiced by Luise Abramowski and Rudolph Lorenz,<sup>34</sup> and summarized, supported, and added to by David Brakke.<sup>35</sup> The antiquity of the Greek seems broadly supported. There is, moreover, a corroborative approach to testing it: the search for parallels in Athanasius's indubitably genuine works.<sup>36</sup> Success there would help to restore both language and author to their ancient eminence. The alleged parallels, however, prove less than helpful. Brakke has shown that many of the pinpointed characteristics and allusions merely suggest the influence of an extensive Alexandrian tradition, which sprang from Clement and Origen, if not from Philo, and which any number

33. Barnes, "Angel of Light," esp. 357; for the unmasking of additions or omissions, see 360–64. Tetz's suggestion that Athanasius was an editor dependent on Serapion of Thmuis is undermined by Fitschen *Serapion von Thmuis*, 57–64. Older doubts were concurrently resurrected about other witnesses. *Epistola ad monachos* 13 (PG 40: 940) can no longer be attributed to Serapion: Fitschen, 79–84; Brakke, *Athanasius*, 15 n. 31; Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 240 n. 64. Gregory of Nazianzus's *Oratio* 21.5 may refer to the *Life* in the phrase τοῦ μοναχικοῦ βίου νομοθεσίαν; but that contrasts with the presentation of Antony's ἱκανὸς χαρακτήρ in *Pref.* 3, which suggests example more than prescription (although note Bartelink, *Vie*, 29, and Brakke, *Athanasius*, 201). Jerome famously attributed the *Life* to Athanasius in his *De viris illustribus* 87 and 125, but was wholly unspecific in his earlier *Vita Pauli*. So also, in fact, was Augustine in *Confessions* 8.6.15: *codicem in quo scripta erat vita Antonii*. See Barnes, "Angel of Light," 359.

34. Abramowski, "Syrische Fassung;" Lorenz, "Die griechische *Vita Antonii* des Athanasius und ihre syrische Fassung."

35. Particularly in relation to supposed "Copticisms" in the Syriac text: Brakke, "Greek and Syriac Versions of the *Life of Antony*," 29–34. He took that position entirely for granted in his *Athanasius*. Bartelink, *Vie*, 33, was equally swift to accept the arguments of Abramowski and Lorenz.

36. Abramowski, "Syrische Fassung," 54–56; Louth, "St Athanasius and the Greek *Life of Antony*," 504–7.



of writers could have shared. Moreover, both he and others regard hunting for "accurate facts" in the text as an unsound way of confirming or rejecting Athanasius's influence.<sup>37</sup>

It may still be possible to argue, therefore, that the *Antony of the Life* is not entirely the product of Athanasius's creative imagination, but rather part of some other attempt to place a famous Egyptian ascetic within a Christian "philosophical" tradition. While we may place our faith in the Greek, attachment to Athanasius can still seem less than obligatory. Consequently, we have to start with the text rather than with the author, and that is the approach I have taken here. It is the "textuality" of the biography that has to be acknowledged. The Greek *Life* is a discourse, not a report; and its associations should be identified in that light.<sup>38</sup> If we wish, therefore, to defend the likelihood of Athanasian authorship, we have to ask first what Athanasius could have hoped to gain from writing such a work.

A connection with heresy, and specifically with the Arian controversy, seems an obvious starting point: Athanasius might have wished to use Antony in the struggle. Here we return to Antony's visit to Alexandria in A.D. 338 and to the role that Athanasius himself might have played on that occasion. Unfortunately, as we have said, the *Life* states clearly that Antony went to the city at the invitation of "bishops" (in the plural: παρὰ τε τῶν ἐπισκόπων) and also [παρὰ] τῶν ἀδελφῶν πάντων. The patriarch himself is not named (69.2). And that must cast doubt on the suggestion that the later phrase, still referring to the visit, "we escorted him" (προεπέμπομεν αὐτόν), is a reference by Athanasius (as author) to himself, or at least should be taken to include him (71.1). Where Athanasius is mentioned in the *Life*, a reference to the author of the text is, by a straightforward interpretation, ruled out (91.8; and the same point would affect our reading of 92.3).<sup>39</sup>

37. Brakke, "Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana," 18, and *Athanasius*, 219–20; Barnes, "Angel of Light," passim; Hertling, "Studi storici," 17. Serious problems attach to the story of Balacius in VA 86, supposedly reflected in Athanasius *Historia Arianorum ad monachos* 14 (PG 25: 708–9; see Brakke, *Athanasius*, 1, 98–9, 205, 217 n. 64. The two texts are more than "un peu différente," contrary to Bartelink, *Vie*, 357 n. 2. See also Daniélou, "Démon de l'air dans la 'Vie d'Antoine,'" 143–47.

38. The point was central to the earlier debates of Holl, *Enthusiasmus und Bußgewalt beim griechischen Mönchtum*, 144–53, and Reitzenstein, *Des Athanasius Werk über das Leben des Antonius*. See Frankfurter, *Elijah*, 77, 279. Brakke, "Greek and Syriac Versions," 41, is good on "reference to the author's literary purposes."

39. The difficulties have been rehearsed at length: Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantine*, 268 n. 23, and, for the date, p. 45 (following "Angel of Light," 364, accepted by

One has to ask more generally, anyway, why ascetics could be thought useful models or allies in a conflict with heresy. For Andrew Louth, the motive is "probably hidden from us for ever," although the ploy was "not surprising": yet such admiration expressed in such a cause does not fit easily with other impressions of the patriarch.<sup>40</sup> Did Athanasius want to dominate the recalcitrant, or harness the admired? Brakke solves the problem bravely: "The *Life of Antony* was," he writes, "the climactic weapon in Athanasius' campaign against monastic sympathy for the Arian cause and indifference about the controversy," and "Athanasius' ultimate weapon in his anti-Arian work during the third exile." Both the image of the ascetic in the text itself, however, and the restricted weight of anti-heretical sentiment make this an optimistic description. A surprising degree of initiative is attributed to Antony himself in the criticism of heretics. It seems far-fetched to suppose that some species of "domestication" has been imposed upon him, at the expense of the contrasting allusions to his independence already mentioned.<sup>41</sup>

We might seek alternative aid in a consideration of the work's hoped-for audience. Martin Tetz believes that the *Life* was an *Antwort-brief*; but who raised the *Frage*?<sup>42</sup> Much hinges here on the Preface, which many have assumed demands a foreign audience. A phrase in the title of the work, ἐν τῇ ξένῃ (as it were, "abroad"), proves little.<sup>43</sup> The author's placing of himself ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ (*Pref.* 1) need not mean that his addressees resided entirely outside Egypt, as we think of it today, and reference to the suitable time for sailing (ὁ καιρὸς τῶν

Brakke, *Athanasius*, 205–6); Abramowski, "Syrische Fassung," 49; Steidle (singularly undisturbed), "Homo Dei Antonius," 150–52; Tetz, "Athanasius und die *Vita Antonii*," 23–24 (I have always used the pagination of the original). For intervention by "holy men" in public affairs, see Cracco Ruggini, "Imperatori romani e uomini divini," 22, with allusions to pagan analogues and to theurgy, all of which the *Life* might have attempted to counter.

40. Louth, "St. Athanasius," 509. What he calls "the fragility of [Athanasius's] hold on power" in A.D. 338 would not explain the function of the anecdote in the period after A.D. 356: see Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantine*, 45, 97.

41. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 135, 137, anticipated by Rubenson, *Letters of St Antony*, 131 and n. 1. See Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantine*, 97.

42. Tetz, "Athanasius und die *Vita Antonii*," 6.

43. Bartelink's comments are unconvincing. The title is almost certainly late. The asserted echoes of Athanasius are wholly insecure: the texts quoted, *Vie*, 46, are not by Athanasius at all, but included by him in his *Apol. c. Arianos* 3. They use, in any case, the phrase ἐπὶ ξένης; see PG 25: 252C, 272A. Mansi, 2.1236D has ἐπὶ τῆς ξένης (as a translation of *peregre illi commoranti*).

πλωίμων [Pref. 5]) is still compatible with an audience further south.<sup>44</sup> It is possible, however, that a Greek text was exported from Egypt and then made more widely available elsewhere—as, in the West, by the anonymous Latin translation. Surviving Coptic versions might represent a similar type of dissemination in Upper Egypt.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, if we do opt for a foreign audience (at least in the mind of the Preface writer), we then have to explain how a work written for ascetics elsewhere could have been designed chiefly as a means of achieving unity within Egypt itself.<sup>46</sup>

Whatever choice we make in these matters, therefore, none seems to prove beyond doubt that Athanasius was the author of the surviving Greek text.<sup>47</sup> The arguments thought most to support the priority (and therefore the reliability) of that text are different from those designed to support the authorship of the patriarch; and the first set of arguments seems more secure than the second. That will justify us in thinking of the Greek *Life* as an ancient, deliberate, and influential attempt to express some approval of teaching authority among Egyptian ascetics. We may not in the process have accepted Barnes's more radical advice "to discard cherished beliefs,"<sup>48</sup> but by avoiding a presumption a priori that Athanasius was the author, we make it easier to acknowledge features of the *Life* that might otherwise have been ruled out as "un-Athanasian."

#### ANTONY IN HIS LETTERS

One is strengthened in that policy by the fact that the hero of the *Life* is recognizably the man who appears in Antony's letters as inter-

44. VA, Pref. 1 and 5. The *Life* is not consistent in its use of "Egypt." Broad reference is suggested by 3.2; 32.1; 82.3; 87.3, and the obvious 86.4 (referring to the Prefect). 57.1–2, however, 59.2, and possibly 91.6 appear to have narrower regions in view. Lorenz, "Griechische Vita," 83–84, insisted on an overseas audience. His argument still allows one to think of the *Life* as written amidst a more extended interchange of stories about Antony.

45. See Garitte, "Le texte grec et les versions anciennes de la Vie de saint Antoine," 6. Barnes ("Angel of Light," 357, 360) was criticized by Abramowski, "Syrische Fassung," 56, for suggesting a Pachomian audience. VA 12.4 does find it necessary to explain bread-making customs in the Thebaid.

46. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 262, 264. For the added possibility of a pagan audience, see Rubenson, *Letters of St Antony*, 132, 139.

47. See the careful admission of Lorenz, "Griechische Vita," 80.

48. Barnes, "Angel of Light," 354.

preted by Samuel Rubenson. Our colleague's portrait is a complex one. Antony was likely to have been, he writes, "a disciple of wandering ascetics teaching a philosophically speculative theology." "There is little in the *Vita*," he adds, "that contradicts the image of Antony as a monastic leader in correspondence with his communities of disciples"—"an active leader who feels responsible for his children" ("leader," for Rubenson, means "teacher of *gnosis*"). Then (and only then) comes the Athanasian factor: "In the *Vita*," writes Rubenson, "Antony is still the charismatic teacher, 'taught by God alone' [66.2], but he has also become the defender of the Church and the adversary of heretics"; and again, "the historical Antony is not eradicated in the biography, but made to serve the needs of the Church." Those elements are, crucially, an addition rather than a substitute.<sup>49</sup>

I begin with that point because Rubenson is too honest to overlook the differences between Antony's letters and the Greek *Life*. The *Life*, he thinks, was written "either in order to present pagans with a Christian as the ideal philosopher, or in order to give Christians an ideal to imitate." It is, however, precisely our task to choose between those motives, or rather to pose the question of whether that is indeed the choice. Rubenson follows Hermann Dörries in detecting "a profound theological reworking," which in this instance represents "an Athanasian imprint" and the desire "less to propagate the ideals of the Egyptian monks, than to correct them and enlist the support of the monks for the author's ecclesiastical policy." There are "good reasons," Rubenson adds, "to doubt that the early monks were as uneducated, as obedient to ecclesiastical office, and as stoutly orthodox as Athanasius depicts Antony." Nevertheless, the *Life* emphasizes ἄσκησις while the letters admire γνῶσις, and hence, while the latter invite the reader "to understand the teaching," the former demand that one "emulate the ideal." The difference lies in the genre, historical setting, and, above all, literary purpose.<sup>50</sup>

My own suggestion is that the differences are not, in any case, so great. I find in the *Life* vivid traces of what Brakke would limit to the

49. Rubenson, *Letters of St Antony*, 143–44; see also 131 ("not distorted, but transformed").

50. Rubenson, *Letters of St Antony*, 130–32; see also, for further reflection on ἄσκησις, p. 139. The allusion is to Dörries, "Vita Antonii als Geschichtsquelle." Frankfurter, *Elijah*, 96–99, discusses specific forms of σοφία.

letters. In them, he writes, Antony is presented "as a teacher of wisdom, an instructor in the kind of philosophy that seeks to inform the student about God and the world and to lead the student into a more virtuous life." "We are dealing here," he continues (i.e., in the letters), "with a monasticized form of the teaching authority exercised in the study circles of urban Alexandria: an academic Christianity of the desert, with its attendant dangers to the authority wielded by the clergy." It will be apparent that I think something similar may be said of the *Life*, which may provide no less assured an access to "the monk's own view of himself."<sup>51</sup> Naturally, I take to heart other oppositions between the two sets of evidence, no less important to Rubenson: the absence of a "Christocentric perspective" in the letters; the distinction between "purification" in the letters and "warfare" in the *Life*; and the latter's less easy relationship with paganism.<sup>52</sup> Those features do not, however, impinge directly on Antony's status as a teacher.

### CONCLUSION

The Greek *Life* of Antony therefore provides further evidence that the title "teacher" or "master" (rather than, say, "mediator" or "example") was thought the most appropriate way of defining the authority and task of leading ascetics. Of course, there was dispute—not every ascetic would have approved of the emphasis—but the very tone of the debate shows that the usage was both popular and effective. Ascetic men, perhaps more than bishops, were portrayed as inheriting and transforming the institutions of παιδεία. As far as Antony himself is concerned, he was a teacher in that sense. The Greek *Life* can be regarded as reflecting an interpretation of his significance current in his lifetime, and it may well at times reflect his own assessment. That Athanasius could have penned such a portrait is certainly possible, perhaps even probable; but, if he did, and if his Antony can be taken as authentic, at least as an ideal, then he was not the Athanasius some have thought him to be.

51. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 213.

52. Rubenson, *Letters of St Antony*, 137–40. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 248, is good on the "christological corrective" in VA.

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## 5

## Philosophy and Simplicity

*The Problem of Classical Education  
in Early Christian Biography*

SAMUEL RUBENSON

When he was a child he lived with his parents, cognizant of little else besides them and his home. As he grew and became a boy, and was advancing in years, he could not bear to learn letters, wishing also to stand apart from friendship with other children. All his yearning, as it has been written [of Jacob], was for living, an unaffected person, in his home.

Καὶ παιδίον μὲν ὦν ἐτρέφετο παρὰ τοῖς γονεῦσι, πλεον αὐτῶν καὶ τοῦ οἴκου μηδὲν ἕτερον γινώσκων. Ἐπειδὴ δὲ καὶ αὐξήσας ἐγένετο παῖς καὶ προέκοπτε τῇ ἡλικίᾳ, γράμματα μὲν μαθεῖν οὐκ ἠνέσχετο, βουλόμενος ἐκτὸς εἶναι καὶ τῆς πρὸς τοὺς παῖδας συνηθείας. Τὴν δὲ ἐπιθυμίαν πᾶσαν εἶχε, κατὰ τὸ γεγραμμένον, ὡς ἄπλαστος οἰκεῖν ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ.

The Life of St. Antony 1

Thus begins probably the best known and most widely read early Christian biography.<sup>1</sup> The author's decision to make the lack of schooling a sign of the holiness of Antony, the beginning of his saintly life, has had far-reaching consequences. The image of Antony as uneducated and illiterate—exemplifying St. Paul's famous assertion that God "chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise"—has greatly contributed to the idea that the ideal desert monk, even the ideal saint, is one who is totally unaffected by schooling, a prophet

1. The chapter epigraph quotes the *Vita Antonii* 1, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, Eng. trans. Gregg, *Athanasius*, 30. The explicit reference to Jacob is only found in the later metaphrastic Greek MSS on which the Migne text is based, but it is already attested in the early Latin translation (see G. J. M. Bartelink, *Vita di Antonio*, 3d ed. [Milan, 1981]).

taught by God alone, and himself a teacher of supreme wisdom. What is surprising is that most modern scholars have readily accepted this rhetorical introduction to Antony's career as a historical fact.<sup>2</sup> That Antony later on, at the height of his career, is described as an accomplished philosopher, amply able to illustrate that Christianity is intellectually superior to Greek mythology, has on the contrary generally been read as something completely lacking historical foundation. Thus scholars have made what in the *Life of St. Antony* is part of an argument about the sources of true knowledge into a solid foundation for a distorted image of the pioneers of Egyptian monasticism as illiterate peasants.<sup>3</sup> There are good reasons to question whether the purpose of this rather startling introduction to the life of a holy man, a man living the true philosophic life, was to situate his hero among unlettered rustics.

Behind the simple statement about Antony's schooling, it is not difficult to perceive a much deeper and more general problem, a problem that naturally haunted any bishop of a great city of the fourth century: How could Christian truth, being a revelation handed down to simple fishermen, also meet the standards of the intellectual elite? How could Christians saints be both undefiled by human learning and wiser than Greek philosophers? How could a well-educated bishop, knowing the values of *paideia*, be an admirer of tales of and about simpletons?<sup>4</sup> The apologists wrote in defense of their faith against the attacks and ridicule of a self-conscious Greek intellectual elite. As teachers of Christian philosophy, they could leave the *simpli-*

2. See, e.g., the articles on Antony in *Dictionnaire de la spiritualité* (G. Bardy) and in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3d ed. (H. Dörries), and see further Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, 78, and Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity from Its Origins to 451 C.E.*, 103. The most obvious result of the opening statement has, however, been the reluctance to accept the letters of Antony as authentic on account of his alleged illiteracy (see n. 3 below).

3. For a more thorough critique of traditional interpretations of VA as evidence for the illiteracy of early Egyptian monasticism, see Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony* (1995), 119–25, 141–44. See also the discussion in Goehring, "Encroaching Desert, Literary Production and Ascetic Space"; id., "Monastic Diversity"; and Luisier, "Autour d'un livre récent et des *Lettres* de saint Antoine." A positive appraisal of monastic literacy is also found in Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, 170–74.

4. The problem is most forcefully expressed by Gregory of Nazianzus in his comment that he would have accepted ἀλογία as faith had he really been a fisherman and had the power of miracles as his mode of speech. See his Or. 36.4. For the general question of the early Christians and learning, see inter alia Gamble, *Books and Readers*, Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, 70–95, and Fox, "Literacy and Power."

ciores behind and maintain that traditional *paideia* was preparatory to Christian truth.<sup>5</sup> With Christianity becoming the officially endorsed cult in the fourth century, and with the simultaneous growth of various forms of monastic anti-culture, the old answers were no longer tenable, at least not in the same form. After Constantine, the bishops were gradually becoming the elite, responsible for the official cult and obliged both to defend *and* transform the culture and civilization they had inherited, including both philosophers and the unlettered.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the challenge of the pagan elite, there were the growing number of alternative spiritual patrons claiming to be Christians and the great variety of alternative interpretations of the Scriptures by teachers of Christian philosophy, of true *gnosis*, as well as perfect *politeia*. In addition to the question of how someone could be a Christian philosopher surpassing his pagan opponents in wisdom and simultaneously an orthodox Christian submissive to the authoritative teaching of the Church, there was the question of how a rustic *idiotes* with spiritual powers could be a civilized man, a model for urban Christians. The role of the teacher and the place of education were becoming questions of vital importance for ecclesiastical authority and the unity of the Church. The accommodation of learning and literature in the Church was no longer a matter of defense against pagans, it was becoming a defense against sectarian Christians relying either on their own philosophical schooling or on the *charismata* of the undefiled.<sup>7</sup>

The idea that a prophet, a revealer of divine knowledge, should himself be devoid of learning, is well attested in Jewish and early Christian tradition. Divine truth is revealed in visions or dreams, and, if in a book, the prophet should, like Ezekiel, rather eat the scroll than study it and reflect on how to communicate its message (Ezek. 3.1–3). In the early Christian revelation known as the *Shepherd of Her-*

5. For the apologists and their reaction to classical education, see the recent survey, with references to older literature, in the introduction by Richard Klein to *Gregor der Wundertäter: Oratio Proshphonetica ac panegyrica in Origenem*, 83–116.

6. For recent studies treating two of the most prominent bishops of the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea and Athanasius, see Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, and Elm, “*Virgins of God*.”

7. For the problem of independently minded teachers, see Williams, *Arius*, and for the connection between sectarian tendencies and monasticism in Egypt, Brakke, “Canon-Formation and Social Conflict,” and Goehring, “Monastic Diversity.” For similar problems in Cappadocia, with an emphasis on the role of women, see Elm, “*Virgins of God*,” 184–223.

*mas*, a work regarded as canonical in wide circles until the fourth century, divine authenticity is safeguarded by the explicit statement that Hermas copied what was shown to him letter by letter, because he did not understand the syllables (Visions 2.1). Spiritual power had other sources and manifestations than literacy. And in contrast to the Jews, for whom scribes—that is, professional students of the holy texts—were necessary to interpret divine revelation, Christians found in the New Testament arguments against serving letters. To Montanists as well as many Gnostics, the ability to interpret divine truth had little to do with an acquired ability to read a text, or interpret it with the help of logic. To others, more orthodox, a reliance on classical education was dangerous to the purity of the Gospel.<sup>8</sup> In the long run, there was, however, no way to support the growth and protect the unity of the Church without relying on literacy.<sup>9</sup> But if it was almost inevitable that bishops, teachers, presbyters, and lectors should be literate, what about the zealous ascetics, who without holding any office had considerable spiritual power, partly precisely because they did not belong to the culture of the society at large? Could someone be a “holy man” if he had had a Greek—that is, pagan—education?

The early biographers of Christian saints wrote in the context of this conflict between a tradition emphasizing the rejection of worldly learning and the purity of the ideal Christian, on the one hand, and the need, not only to accommodate literacy in the Church, but even to create forms for and enhance the value of learning and culture in an established Church, on the other. In contrast to the biographies of later centuries, such as, for example, those of Cyril of Scythopolis, where education is simply taken for granted, the authors of the fourth century still perceived the paganism permeating all education as a foe, a potential threat. Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, and at least the Greek followers of Pachomius knew very well that many pagans did not at all appreciate Christians taking over their heritage, the most radical example of this being the emperor Julian, with his edict

8. Most vividly demonstrated in the prohibition for Christians to be teachers in Hippolytus, *Traditio apostolica* 16.5.

9. For the question of literacy and spiritual power, see Fox, “Literacy and Power,” 126–48. See also the discussion on learning and literacy in third- and fourth-century Egypt in Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony* (1995), 109–15 and 119–25, with references to the evidence of the papyri.

against Christian teachers of Greek *paideia*.<sup>10</sup> In their stories the biographers thus had to find solutions to the problem of how to present ideal Christians as being at the same time pure, divinely inspired prophets and accomplished philosophers, uncorrupted visionaries and trained teachers. They had to find ways to combine biblical images and ideals, biblical saints, with deeply rooted, pervasive rhetoric devices and conceptions so that both the general public and the literate intellectual elite could accept someone as a Christian saint and simultaneously recognize in him a true philosopher.<sup>11</sup>

According to common biographical tradition, the life of a philosopher should be introduced not only by information about land of origin and parents, but also about education, before the career of teaching, ascetic struggle and miracles, and finally the accomplished virtues are described. But the lack of any concept of progress in traditional biography naturally led to the idea that the superior gifts of perception and understanding of the wise philosopher were present from the beginning. The role of education seems, in the words of Patricia Cox, to have been primarily that of "a kind of discipline, the fine tuning of an already overpowering intelligence."<sup>12</sup> Education in the myths and in philosophical tradition, in Homer and Plato, as well as rhetorical skill, did not actually add anything, it simply confirmed inherent and divine wisdom and established the language of the holy man. The tension between an emphasis on some kind of inherent divinity, on the one hand, and participation in the Greek cultural tradition, on the other, is eased by identifying the contents of both.

For the Christian biographer, the problem was greater. Somehow the authors of early Christian biographies had to come to terms with the fact that all education was Greek, while at the same time a holy life was a philosophical life in which detachment from the world and asceticism had the purpose of refining knowledge, *gnosis*. By looking at how they solved this problem, I think we are able to gain deeper

10. For a discussion of Julian's edict and its significance, see Wilken, *Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 171–76.

11. The importance of biographies of holy men for the Christianization of the rhetoric of late antiquity is rightly emphasized by Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 89–119 and 141–52.

12. For a discussion of how the "holy philosopher" was characterized and of the place of education in biography, see Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 20–23; the quotation above is from p. 22.

insights into the larger question of the transformation of classical culture by the early Church. In order to understand how Greek *paideia* came to be replaced by Christian education, we cannot confine ourselves to the well-known treatises on this topic by St. Basil and St. Augustine,<sup>13</sup> but should also look at how popular hagiography reveals existing tensions, as well as various solutions suggested by their authors. I thus in what follows analyze how the education of a saint is depicted in some of the biographies of the fourth century, starting with the *Life of St. Antony* and continuing with three quite different authors writing in the decades after Athanasius, all of them more or less dependent on his account: St. Jerome, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and the compiler of the Greek *Life of St. Pachomius*.

#### THE LIFE OF ST. ANTONY

What is at stake in the opening phrases of the *Vita Antonii* is much more than some historical facts, it is the theme of the entire biography, the essence of Antony's character. By combining a rejection of *grammata* with a reference to Jacob, who in the Septuagint is described as unformed (*ἄπλαστος*), the author signals the natural and inherent holiness of Antony right from the beginning.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the *Vita*, the two ideas, lack of schooling and a simple and unaffected mind, recur.<sup>15</sup> Antony leaves everything behind, not only money and social status, but also books, in order to remain simple and in accordance with his God-given nature. The only formation he receives and constantly exhorts his disciples to stick to is the practice of asceticism. But in contrast to worldly formation, asceticism does not add anything to man, its purpose is not growth and development but protection of stability. Ascetic formation prevents the ascetic from change, from becoming easily moved by the waves of the sea. It is not based on any education, it does not demand any "crossing of the sea." The combats of Antony and the three stages of his retreat are not so much signs of progress and ascent as proofs of his persistence. Antony re-

13. Basil of Caesarea, *Ad adolescentes*; Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*.

14. VA 1 where the implied reference is to Gen. 25.27.

15. It is, however, important to notice that the lack of *grammata* is not in the VA itself interpreted as illiteracy, but only as a sign of independence of Greek learning. See Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony* (1995), 141–42.

mains the same; his inaccessibility and his exposure to demonic assault are what increase.<sup>16</sup>

When Antony's monastic education is described, the emphasis is thus strongly on the older ascetics as models. Antony *sees* the zealous men, he *sees* their way of life, but nowhere is it said that he *listens* to them and their teaching. His initial monastic education is summarized by the revealing sentence: "He grasped everything and in him the memory took the place of books" (VA 3).<sup>17</sup> This initial instruction by imitation is, however, only preparatory. Antony's real education takes place in the secrecy of his shrine, where he becomes "initiated into the divine mysteries and inspired by God" (VA 14). When he emerges from his twenty years of seclusion, he is depicted as the perfect natural human being. His body and soul are described as totally unaffected by his twenty years of solitude, spiritual combat, and ascetic endeavors. He has neither become fat from lack of exercise nor emaciated from fasting. His soul is neither constricted by grief nor relaxed by pleasure. "He maintained utter equilibrium, like one guided by reason and steadfast in that which accords with nature" (VA 14).<sup>18</sup> The same emphasis on preservation of the natural condition is found in the concluding passage commenting on his life after the description of his death: "He possessed eyes undimmed and sound, and he saw clearly. He lost none of his teeth—they simply had been worn to the gums because of the old man's great age. He also retained health in his feet and hands, and generally he seemed brighter and of more energetic strength than those who make use of baths and a variety of foods and clothing" (VA 93).

The long sermon he preaches after his initiation also revolves around this theme: virtue is natural and simple. Everything necessary and beneficial is inherent in man. Everything external is a threat to inner unity, equilibrium, and calm. The Greeks travel to obtain wisdom, but the "kingdom of heaven" is within ourselves. "All virtue

16. In opposition to the established interpretation (see, e.g., Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 53–54), I agree with Roldanus, "Origène, Antoine et Athanase," which emphasizes that the stages in the VA are not characterized by any *internal* development.

17. A saying preserved by Evagrius of Pontus catches the same attitude: Antony is said to have replied to the philosophers that he did not miss the comfort of books, since his book is the nature of things created. See Evagrius of Pontus, *Praktikos* 92, quoted *verbatim* in Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.23. See Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony* (1995), 159.

18. ... ὁλος ἦν ἴσος, ὡς ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου κυβερνώμενος καὶ ἐν τῇ κατὰ φύσιν ἐστῶς.

needs is our willing, since it is in us and arises from us. For virtue exists when the soul maintains its intellectual part according to nature. It holds fast according to nature when it remains as it was made—and it was made beautiful and perfectly straight" (VA 20).<sup>19</sup> Later on in the sermon, even the Scriptures are relativized: like everything else from the world of senses, they can easily be used by the demons. Final authority and judgment lies within man himself, with what does not disturb or distract from simplicity and single-mindedness. The sermon thus ends with pointing at detachment, ἀταραξία, as the sign of perfection.<sup>20</sup>

The most evident passages on our theme are, however, the descriptions of Antony's three encounters with the philosophers. The two first stories are very short, contrasting Antony's wisdom, in spite of his lack of education, with the futile cunning of the philosophers. Both are introduced with a reference to Antony not having studied *grammata*, and both end with the philosophers withdrawing, amazed by his intelligence and understanding. In the first story what is deemed foolish emerges as wise; in the second, the opposition is between a sound mind and acquired letters. The philosophers have to admit that the mind, *nous*, is prior to letters, *grammata*, and thus that one who has a sound mind does not need to study, and, moreover, that an untrained man from the wilderness might be as civilized and gracious as any city-dweller: "They [the philosophers] went away marveling because they had seen such understanding [σύνεσις] in an untrained man [ἰδιώτης], for he did not have the wild demeanor [ἄργριος] of someone reared on a mountain and growing old there. Instead he was gracious and civil [πολιτικός], and his speech was seasoned with divine salt, so that no one resented him—on the contrary, all who came to him rejoiced over him" (VA 73).

The third and most detailed encounter is actually an apology for Christian faith and an attack on pagan beliefs. Antony is challenged by a group of philosophers who use their logic to ridicule the fool-

19. This is a not only a theme constantly recurring in the VA, but an Antonian conviction also attested in his letters. See *Ep. Ant.* 3.43–48; 4.16–18. The same idea is also found in Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 6.35: "Hard as it is to know oneself, I myself consider it harder for the sage to remain always himself; for he cannot ever reform evil natures and improve them, unless he has first trained himself never to alter in his own person" (quoted in Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 25).

20. VA 43. The same expression is used in ch. 36 as the proof of a vision being angelic and not demonic.



ishness of Christian faith. Antony replies by ridiculing both traditional pagan myths and what is most probably some kind of Neoplatonic or Gnostic teaching about the *nous*. He then attacks the philosophers on their own ground, forcing them to admit that faith (*pistis*) is prior to demonstration (*apodeixis*), and that where there is active faith, there is consequently no need for any sophistic demonstration. To prove his case, Antony heals some bystanders suffering from demons, explaining, with an allusion to St. Paul: "We do not prove in plausible words of Greek wisdom but persuade by the faith that clearly precedes argumentation" (VA 80). In all this Antony himself argues like an accomplished philosopher, using *apodeixis*. What is at stake is apparently not primarily the method but the source of knowledge, the difference between inherent, and thus divine, wisdom and power, on the one hand, and acquired, and thus human, futile and feeble logic, on the other. Faith in Christ simply makes proofs by arguments irrelevant.<sup>21</sup>

Summarizing his entire account, the author of the *Vita*, after relating the death of Antony, describes him as totally uncorrupted, his body remaining in perfect health, and as marveled at everywhere, because his fame did not rest on writings (συγγράμματα), secular wisdom (ἡ ἔξωθεν σοφία), or any skill (τέχνη), but on his piety (θεοσέβεια) alone (VA 93).<sup>22</sup> From beginning to end, Antony is depicted as a natural, unaffected, simple-minded human being, in conscious opposition to the learned and diligent philosophers of this age. His wisdom is not based on any human sources; it has not been gained from outside. He is, as it is said in a revealing passage, "taught by God"

21. It is worth noting that the author in the quotation from 1 Cor. 2.4 drops the positive reference to ἀποδείξεις πνεύματος and only cites the rejection of persuasion by words of wisdom.

22. The expression ἡ ἔξωθεν σοφία, as well as the related expressions ἡ ἔξωθεν παίδευσις and ἡ ἔξω φιλοσοφία used by Gregory of Nyssa in his biographies, are difficult to translate. In addition to the literal meaning *outside, outward, external*, ἔξω and ἔξωθεν are also used for foreigners or exiles in classical literature, while in the Septuagint and the New Testament, reference is usually to those outside, i.e., the non-Jews. With Paul's expression ὁ ἔξω ἄνθρωπος, a new dimension is added. See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1985), 2: 575–76, 698–99, and *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 503–4. Moreover, the traditional translations, pagan or profane, as opposed to Christian or religious, do not include the associated meaning "public," in contrast to "secret," that is reserved for the initiated. Despite some misgivings, I have decided to stick to *secular wisdom, secular education*, etc.

(θεοδιδάκτος).<sup>23</sup> But the holiness of Antony is not only, or even primarily, revealed in anecdotes about miracles, visions, and his ascetic combat, elements common to stories about holy men, but rather in his teaching, summarized in two sermons, covering almost a third of the biography, and his three debates with the philosophers. His essential character, natural simplicity, not only reveals his affinity to the divine, it also manifests a philosophy superior to Greek mythology, based on an education that is not merely human. The biblical models are Jacob and Elijah, not Moses or Solomon.

#### THE BIOGRAPHIES OF ST. JEROME

The first clear evidence of the great impact of the *Life of St. Antony* is found in one of the first literary works of Jerome, his *Life of St. Paul the Hermit*, written ca. A.D. 375. Jerome explicitly refers to discussions as to who was the first monk, and quotes the statement in the *Life of St. Antony* that Antony was the first to settle in the desert.<sup>24</sup> Through Jerome we also know that his benefactor at the time he wrote the *Life of St. Paul* had made a Latin translation of the *Life of St. Antony*. Most probably the *Life of St. Antony* was not only one of his sources but the very stimulus that prompted him to write.<sup>25</sup> In his second biographical work, the *Life of St. Hilarion*, Jerome again returns to Antony, first briefly as the original inspiration for Hilarion, and later as the goal for his flight from fame in Palestine.<sup>26</sup> It is obvious in his lives of the hermit saints Paul and Hilarion that Jerome both wants to take advantage of Antony's fame and to distance his two heroes from Antony, avoiding any impression that he was their master. Only his third biography, that of Malchus, does not explicitly mention Antony.<sup>27</sup>

In spite of this connection, Jerome's lives are very different from the *Life of St. Antony*. Besides the obvious fact that Jerome, unlike

23. VA 66.

24. *Vita Pauli* 1, ed. PL 23: 17–28.

25. For other references to the VA in Jerome see his *De viris illustribus* 125 and *Epistula* 57. In addition to the explicit intention to rectify the impression given in the VA that Antony was the first desert hermit, Jerome skillfully changes the story told in VA 91 about the cloak he had been given by Athanasius. Instead of the cloak being handed back as a sign of subordination and that the assignment was fulfilled, the cloak is on Paul's orders used to wrap his dead body, not because this was by any means important, but simply to help Antony to overcome the death of this greater saint. See *VPaul* 12.

26. *Vita Hilarionis*, ed. PL 23: 29–54.

27. *Vita Malchi*, ed. PL 23: 55–60.

Athanasius, was a very self-conscious author, the stated purpose of his biographies is also quite different. Jerome explicitly says that he wrote the *Life of St. Paul* simply because he thought it wrong that Paul's history should be forgotten. Likewise, in his *Life of St. Hilarion*, he refers to the need to have his hero's story retold. The third story Jerome states to be nothing but a practice in anticipation of his never realized Church history. Athanasius says he is writing a story to be emulated, but Jerome writes because he has stories to tell. He writes about persons he has heard interesting things about, whereas Athanasius writes about his own ideals personified in someone he claims to have known very well. Thus there is an intimacy in the *Life of St. Antony* that is totally missing in Jerome's biographies. Although he attempts to tell stories about extraordinary individuals, not to depict an ideal, Jerome strangely enough ends up creating a much larger distance between the reader and the heroes. Paul, Hilarion, and Malchus are far less alive than Antony. Their stories are told, but there is almost no interest in their own experiences and inner struggle, and there are no vivid descriptions of their encounters with others.<sup>28</sup> Instead, Jerome constantly alludes to classical literature, using well-known *topoi* of novels and biographies. The *Life of St. Paul* is full of references and allusions to classical literature, including encounters with centaurs and lions. The *Life of St. Hilarion* is introduced by a quotation from Sallust, according to which the greatness of a hero depends on the skill of the biographer, and a hint that the story Jerome is to tell will make Homer envious. The third, the *Life of Malchus*, is a Christian copy of a traditional love story. Jerome writes in order to prove his literary abilities, to show that Christian literature can be as good as pagan, and simply to amuse his audience. The constant call to emulate the saint, so characteristic of the *Life of St. Antony*, is thus completely missing from Jerome's lives.<sup>29</sup>

Jerome's own struggle with the problem of classical education and biblical simplicity is well known and will not be retold here.<sup>30</sup> A lover of antique authors, and himself a proud man of letters, he was con-

28. Coleiro, "St. Jerome's Lives of the Hermits," 166, notes that although he purports to be writing historical texts, Jerome completely fails to connect his heroes with the outer world and its known historical events.

29. For a discussion of the structure and models for Jerome's biographies, see Fuhrmann, "Mönchsgeschichten des Hieronymus."

30. For details of this, see, e.g., Kelly, *Jerome*, 41–44; Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, 81–83, and Hagendahl, *Latin Fathers and the Classics*, 309–28.

stantly ashamed of his admiration for Latin and Greek authors and likewise ashamed of the literary poverty of the biblical texts. To Jerome there was definitely a conflict between *paideia* and faith, not only theoretically but also personally. In spite of his own preferences, he maintained that the Christian had to abandon the classical heritage and stick to the pure and simple faith of the Bible. Although the lives of his holy men might therefore be expected to reflect this detachment and stick closely to the model of the *Life of St. Antony*, the opposite is true. In his biographies, Jerome solves the relation between classical education and the sanctity of the holy man very differently. It is even possible to read at least the lives of Paul and Hilarion as explicit criticisms of the way Athanasius makes someone who is uneducated a model for the Christian monk.

After telling us where Paul came from, his family background, and his age, Jerome says that he was both "highly skilled in Greek as well as Egyptian learning" and "gifted with a gentle disposition and a deep love for God,"<sup>31</sup> indicating that this learning was not something acquired prior to his becoming a Christian and later rejected. He was a civilized man, and his flight into the desert was not caused by a desire to renounce the world and its learning, but entirely by fear of persecution. In contrast to Antony, Paul was a Christian who had no difficulty with his worldly learning, and who went into the desert out of sheer necessity. There was nothing to reject and no fight to engage in. Later, like Antony, he fell in love with the solitude and decided to settle down there. Nowhere is there any mention of conflict with philosophers or emphasis on natural simplicity in contrast to secular life. Throughout the story, Paul is calm and relaxed; it is Antony, visiting him, who experiences anxiety, the onslaught of the demons, and external pressure.<sup>32</sup> Antony also has to admit that Paul far surpasses him in everything, and at the end he becomes his heir, the Elisha of Elijah.<sup>33</sup> For Paul, his background is never a problem, never a temptation, only a sign of the greatness of the holy man who, although so gifted and educated, preferred the silence of the desert.

31. *VPaul* 4: "Litteris tam Graecis quam Aegyptiacis adprime eruditus, mansueti animi, Deum valde amans."

32. See, e.g., *VPaul* 9–14.

33. See *VPaul* 9, where Antony echoes the words of St. John the Baptist about not being worthy to serve Christ; ch. 12 where Antony has to fetch the cloak given to him by Athanasius and use it to wrap Paul's body after his death, and ch. 13, where Paul is likened to Elijah, John the Baptist, and even St. Paul perfected in paradise.

It is not difficult to see the shadow of Jerome himself in his story of Paul, and perhaps also his disdain for the coarse monks of the wilderness claiming to be the heirs of the first hermit and desert-dweller.

The much longer *Life of St. Hilarion* is very different, but reveals the same attitude. Here again, after presenting his birthplace and his family, we are told that Hilarion was sent to Alexandria to study. Although Jerome explicitly states that it was his pagan parents who sent him to the pagan school, Hilarion is said to have given proofs of remarkable ability and character and soon to have become an accomplished rhetor. In contrast to Antony, Hilarion has no difficulties with his fellow students and does not hesitate to travel to gain education. Without the mention of any kind of conversion, Hilarion is also described as a believer in Christ, having his whole pleasure in the assemblies of the Church (VH 2). His retreat into the desert is not caused by any rejection of the world, but by curiosity aroused by Antony's fame. After staying with Antony for some time, Hilarion decides to change his life and become a monk. But the crowds pressing upon the holy man disturb him and he decides to retreat into the desert. A description of his *ascesis*, his struggle with demons, and his miracles follows. In his retreat, there is, however, very little of solitude: what matters is service to the community, not spiritual combat in total seclusion. Completely missing is the theme of natural simplicity as opposed to secular learning. Instead of any sermon or teaching, the *Life* is filled with numerous stories of Hilarion's miracles and finally a series of chapters recounting his flight from fame, taking him from Gaza to Egypt and then to Sicily and Dalmatia, before ending up in Cyprus.<sup>34</sup> Nowhere is Hilarion troubled by philosophers, nowhere is he said to have been taught by God alone. Like the Greek philosophers whom Antony ridicules, Hilarion traverses the sea, although not to gain *gnosis*, but rather to demonstrate his achievements.<sup>35</sup> His fame does not rest on his being wise in spite of being uneducated, but on his miracles.

The third biography, the *Life of Malchus*, is an entirely different story. Jerome claims to have heard it from Evagrius of Antioch, his

host in Syria. After recounting Malchus's origin and his relation to his parents, Jerome goes on to tell us that he fled home to avoid marriage and become a monk. After many years, we are told, Malchus decided to go home to his country, in spite of his abbot trying to prevent him.<sup>36</sup> The major part is, then, the story of Malchus's adventures with robbers and with a woman captured together with him, their escape, a lion killing their pursuers, and Malchus's final return to the monastery. The biography has more in common with a novel (robbers, a beautiful woman, a slave dealer, escape by night, pursuers, a lion, and a happy ending) than with the traditional lives of holy men. There is no word about education, whether secular or Christian, nothing about theology or forms of worship, and even very little on asceticism. Malchus is not someone to emulate, and the entire story is told not to edify but to amuse. By putting an emphasis on Malchus being Syriac and non-Greek, Jerome actually enhances the distance between his readers and his subject. Malchus belongs to the rural wilderness, he is a natural hero, someone a civilized person can read about and marvel at, but not identify with. Classical education features in the lives of Paul and Hilarion, but it is of no importance, whether positively or negatively. In the *Life of Malchus*, Jerome goes a step further and makes classical education totally irrelevant.

It is not difficult to see how his lives of Paul, Hilarion, and Malchus reflect Jerome's own concerns. Classical education and social respectability are harmonized with the ideal of Christian asceticism and obligations to the community.<sup>37</sup> What finally makes Malchus escape from his captivity is the image of the ants working for their common good, an implicit criticism of the solitary and rather comfortable life of the hermit. Like Jerome, Hilarion remains closely in touch with the world he has forsaken. Like him, his heroes quote classical authors and are well versed in the Scriptures. The conflicts they engage in are not with philosophers but with the pre-Constantinian persecutors of Christianity in the *Life of St. Paul*, with Malchus's pagan master, who insists that he marry (alluding to Pharaoh and Jo-

34. *Vita Hilarionis* 33–41.

35. The contrast between the solitude and *stabilitas loci* of Antony and his emphasis on the futility of studies, travels, and fame, and the way Jerome depicts his hero and his journeys is striking. See VA 20, 49, 85, 90.

36. *Vita Malchi* 3.

37. See *Vita Malchi* 7. We might also compare how the *Life of Paul* focuses on how Antony and Paul shared the bread with the complete lack of any reference to liturgy and communion in the *Life of Antony*, where it is even said that Antony preferred to eat alone. See VA 45.

seph), and with the crowds pressing upon the holy man in the *Life of St. Hilarion*.<sup>38</sup> It is also worth noting that neither Paul nor Hilarion have disciples who have to be taught. Like Malchus and Jerome himself, they stand surprisingly alone. None of them gives a sermon or even reflects on spiritual conflicts or the relation between faith and knowledge. In the ideal life of a saint, there is no tension between faith and knowledge, between divine revelation and classical education. Where Athanasius opted for God-granted and even inherent divine wisdom in contrast to acquired knowledge, Jerome avoids any contrast between these. The idea that one might be born a Christian, that virtue and faith are natural in everyone, was totally foreign to him. But although he strongly maintains that "one becomes a Christian; one is not born one," he is little concerned about any need for conversion.<sup>39</sup>

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA ON  
ST. GREGORY THAUMATURGOS,  
ST. MACRINA THE YOUNGER, AND MOSES

There is no evidence that Gregory of Nyssa ever read *The Life of St. Antony*, although it is quite likely that he did. The Greek text was known to Gregory of Nazianzus at the time of his oration on Athanasius in 373, as well as to Evagrius of Antioch, probably already in 372 when he still was in Rome, and by 385 the Latin version was known in Trier.<sup>40</sup> But even if he read it, there is not the slightest indication that it influenced his own biographical writing. There is no imitation and no competition. Gregory's three lives, the *De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, the *Vita Macrinae*, and the *De vita Moysis*, are very different from one another, and the last one is not really a biography at all. *De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi* and the *Vita Macrinae* deal with Gregory's own family and background, the first being about the conversion of

38. The way Jerome's own life is reflected in the three biographies he wrote would repay a more detailed study. For some examples, see Coleiro "St. Jerome's Lives," 171.

39. For the reference to Jerome, *Epistula* 107.1.4 (*fiunt, non nascuntur Christiani*), as well as a discussion of Jerome's attitude to learning and his difficulties with respect to both promoting and circumscribing education, see Philip Rousseau, "'Learned Women' and the Development of a Christian Culture in Late Antiquity" (the quotation is found on p. 136).

40. For Gregory of Nazianzus, see his *Or.* 21 (PG 35); for Evagrius of Antioch, see Kelly, *Jerome*, 33; for the Latin text read at Trier, see Augustine, *Confessiones* 8.6.15.

his native land and the second about his own sister, but *De vita Moysis* is about a biblical figure. But in spite of their different character, the question of the place of secular education in the life of a Christian is central to all of them.

The first biography by Gregory of Nyssa, the *Life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgos*, presents us with a famous and learned bishop.<sup>41</sup> Unlike Antony, this Gregory is not a poor and illiterate monk of the desert, but a rich, well-educated man from Neocaesarea. His background is not the village church and the Gospel, but the pagan school and the classical authors. His biographer devotes long passages to his zeal for learning and his education, discussing in detail the relation between secular learning and Christian truth, between *Hellenismos* and *Christianismos*. He compares his saint, not only to Moses, who was thoroughly educated in Egyptian knowledge, but also to Abraham, who knew Chaldean wisdom.<sup>42</sup> But, like Joseph, Gregory is not seduced by the world; through restraint, he preserves his integrity. After having thus obtained all secular wisdom, Gregory becomes the student of Origen, who "did not disdain to put other teachings at the service of theology."<sup>43</sup> His background and learning make him suitable to be made bishop of a place with almost no Christians, a missionary to the pagans. The development from student to bishop is natural, there is no conversion or rejection of what he had learnt. When he withdraws from society, it is in order to escape the tumultuous crowd and gain the silence necessary to contemplate divine mysteries. He is unable to escape ordination, however, and the words he has to speak are given to him in a vision. He is the new John the Evangelist.<sup>44</sup> Later, he is both a saint known for his numerous miracles and a wise, virtuous bishop who is able to convert an entire province, teaching the pagans the true faith. The model is not Jacob, but Moses.

41. Gregorius of Nyssa, *De Vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi* (ed. G. Heil, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 7.1). Gregory of Nyssa must have gained most of his information about Gregory Thaumaturgos through family tradition (his grandmother is said to have known Gregory), but it is also possible that he knew the *Oratio panegyrica in Origenem* by Gregory Thaumaturgos himself. For the problems surrounding the life and works of Gregory Thaumaturgos, see the introduction by Klein in *Gregor der Wundertäter*, 7–11, 45–63, and Crouzel, "Faut-il voir trois personnages en Grégoire le Thaumaturge?"

42. *VGThaum* 9. Instead of secular *paideia*, Gregory of Nyssa speaks about ἡ ἐξω σοφία and ἡ ἐξω φιλοσοφία and even ἡ ἐξωθεν διδασκαλία.

43. ἐτέρω χρησασθαι διδασκάλῳ πρὸς τὰ θεῖα τῶν μαθημάτων οὐκ ἀπηξίωσεν (*VGThaum* 13).

44. *VGThaum* 15–19.

Gregory is a prophet whose words are verified by his acts. His simplicity is not inherent, like Antony's, it is a God-granted power—a power manifest also in his being able first to master philosophy and then to leave it behind.

In the *Life of St. Macrina*, Gregory of Nyssa tackles the question of education directly after his account of Macrina's birth, at which she is already marked as a saint by receiving in secrecy the name Thecla.<sup>45</sup> Her saintliness depends on her being chosen by God; it is not of her own making. In contrast to the rejection of education in the *Life of St. Antony* and the approval of it in Jerome's first two lives, Gregory of Nyssa introduces a new option: a Christian education. On the one hand, as befits a child of her class, Macrina is taught what children are usually taught, and as befits a holy woman and teacher of true philosophy, she excels in her studies. On the other hand, her mother rejects the idea of having her read the classical pagan authors, the secular and general education (ἡ ἔξωθεν καὶ ἐγκύκλιος παιδείσις), because of the immorality of the texts. Instead, she is given the Scriptures. Thus Macrina can both be described as a diligent student, always carrying her books, and later on even as a teacher and philosopher,<sup>46</sup> and at the same time as a virgin preserved pure and unaffected by pagan mythology. It must be noted, however, first, that the pagan texts are rejected because of their immorality, not because they are pagan and thus non-Christian, and, second, that the reason for the rejection of the classical authors is closely linked to Macrina's being female and predestined to remain a virgin.<sup>47</sup>

By substituting the Bible for the classical authors, Gregory of Nyssa is not forced to make Macrina unlettered, in spite of the fact that he, like Athanasius, rejects classical *paideia* for his saint. Instead of depicting an opposition between the philosophy of the Greeks and the wisdom of faith, Gregory places the Scriptures as an alternative route to the same goal as the classical philosophical tradition.

45. *VMacr.* 2.

46. For Macrina as a teacher, see *VMacr.* 10, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 26 and 28. For Macrina as the bearer of a higher philosophy, see *VMacr.* 17. The innovative character and significance of Macrina's way of life as a model is emphasized in Elm, "Virgins of God," 39–47, 78–105.

47. Actually the same idea that the education of a Christian girl ought to be restricted to Christian texts is found in Jerome's letter to Laeta about the upbringing of Paula. See Jerome, *Epistula* 107, ed. Hilberg, *CSEL* 55 (1912). For the question of educated Christian women in general, see Rousseau, "Learned Women."

Through the Wisdom of Solomon, Macrina is taught the ethos and philosophy of classical upbringing without having to encounter the stories belonging to pagan mythology.<sup>48</sup> In contrast to Antony, who opposes the philosophers with simple, God-granted faith, Macrina through her studies achieves a higher philosophy. Although her life is circumscribed, her reading restricted to the Scriptures, and her intercourse limited to the family estate, she is able to defeat the philosophers on their own ground. It is not, however, in any real encounter with the philosophers, as in the *Life of St. Antony*, or by reference to miracles that she proves them to be wrong, but in a philosophical dialogue with her brother on her deathbed.<sup>49</sup>

In his *Life of Moses*, written at the end of his life, Gregory of Nyssa develops his views on the place of classical *paideia* in the life of the saint. Here there are no restrictions: Moses is educated in both Egyptian and Greek wisdom.<sup>50</sup> But although adopted by and brought up in the pagan tradition, he returns to his origins. His flight into the desert opens up a second level of education for him and becomes an occasion for greater wisdom. His life is a continuing ascent, in which previous levels are left behind, but not rejected. In the second part of the *Life of Moses*, the contemplation on Moses's life, Gregory interprets the story. Already from the beginning, teaching and knowledge are emphasized as necessary. The ark, which saved Moses from the waters of the Nile, is the basic education in the various disciplines, the only safe refuge in the waves of temptation.<sup>51</sup> Moses's double attachment to the Egyptian princess and his mother signals that, although classical education is necessary, a Christian must at the same time be nourished by the milk of the Church, since secular philosophy (ἡ ἔξωθεν παιδείσις) is barren.<sup>52</sup> Whenever it comes to a conflict between pagan and biblical tradition, the Christian must either fight or flee. And when forced to live together with what is foreign, one must chase away those who misuse *paideia*, that is, heretics (2.16–17). Moses keeps his foreign wife, since there are things in the secular wisdom that should not be rejected by anyone striving for virtue

48. *VMacr.* 3.

49. The dialogue is only hinted at in *VMacr.*, but later developed by Gregory as his *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione*.

50. *Vita Moysis* 1.18–19; 2.7–18.

51. *Ibid.*, 2.6–9.

52. *Ibid.*, 2.10–12.

(2.37). To attain the highest forms of wisdom, it is, however, necessary to leave everything behind and become initiated by God, something Moses experiences on Mount Sinai (2.153).

A key to Gregory's understanding of the role of secular education in the life of the Christian is his interpretation of the plundering of the Egyptians by the Israelites (Exod. 3.21–22, 11.2, 12.35–36), an interpretation also encountered in Origen's letter to Gregory Thaumaturgos, a possible source for Gregory of Nyssa:

The loftier meaning is therefore more fitting than the obvious one. It commands those participating through virtue in the free life also to equip themselves with the wealth of pagan learning by which foreigners to the faith beautify themselves. Our guide in virtue commands someone who "borrows" from wealthy Egyptians to receive such things as moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, dialectic, and whatever else is sought by those outside the Church, since these things will be useful when in time the divine sanctuary of mystery must be beautified with the riches of reason.<sup>53</sup>

What is rejected in the *Life of St. Antony* and bypassed by Jerome is here accepted as something that can be, not only useful, but even used to beautify the divine temple of Christian mystery. The biblical story, interpreted in the *Life of Moses*, becomes a defense for Gregory's own use of his *paideia*.

In Gregory's biographies, it is not the untouched, natural, and immovable holy man that emerges, but the saint ascending to ever higher levels of wisdom and insight. Although Gregory makes it clear in the beginning of his biographies that Macrina, Moses, and Gregory Thaumaturgos were predestined to be saints, belonging to a tradition, perfected from the beginning, there is a marked development in their lives. While their ascetic practice keeps them constantly the same, it also leads them into deeper knowledge of things divine.<sup>54</sup> Revelation of true wisdom, of the mysteries of God, presupposes a long training in which even secular education plays an important formative role. Even a holy man, or woman, has to be formed, if not by Greek *paideia*, by studying the ethics of the Wisdom of Solomon, if

53. Ibid., 2.115. This interpretation is the basis on which the use of philosophy for Christian exegesis is explained in Origen's *Ep. ad Greg. Thaum.*, in Grégoire le Thaumaturge, ed. Crouzel.

54. For examples and a short comment on this, see Harl, "Modèles d'un temps idéal," 223–24.

not by reading Homer, by reading the Psalms.<sup>55</sup> To Gregory, the equilibrium and holy simplicity that mark the saint are not inherent qualities, which merely have to be protected from all external thoughts, but rather the result of a penetration and integration of the deeper essence of all wisdom. Nature is not simply to be preserved, as in the *Life of St. Antony*, but to be outstripped (*VMacr.* 1). Initiation by God does not depend on being uneducated, but rather on having grown up in wisdom and philosophy. The ideal is not Jacob, but Moses.

#### THE LIFE OF ST. PACHOMIUS

The biography in many ways most akin to the *Vita Antonii* is the *Vita Pachomii*, especially in its Greek version. The saint depicted is an Egyptian monk of the same generation, and at least the compiler of the Greek life known as *Vita Prima* makes it clear that the *Life of St. Antony* is his ideal and model.<sup>56</sup> There is also an evident attempt in the *Vita Pachomii* to set up Pachomius as a rival to Antony.<sup>57</sup> But, at the same time, Pachomius belongs to a different world, Coptic Egypt, a world where classical education and knowledge of Greek was more limited. The marriage between Christianity and Greek philosophy was not as natural to the people of Upper Egypt as to those of Alexandria, Antioch, or Athens, and neither was literacy as strongly linked to the Greek classical authors. Added to this is the fact that in contrast to the other biographies, the *Life of St. Pachomius* does not have a single author. Leaving the intricate discussion on the various versions of the *Life* aside, it is obvious that the text is a compilation of stories about Pachomius collected from various sources, many of which were probably oral. The purpose is not the making of a model to emulate, but the preservation of a history that regulates and legitimizes present tradition.<sup>58</sup>

55. A similar use of the three other works of the Septuagint traditionally attributed to Solomon, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, as introductions into the three branches of learning, Ethics, Physics, and Enoptics, is described by Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs, Prologus*, ed. Baehrens.

56. The complicated issue of the various versions of *The Life of Pachomius*, as well as the history and reasons behind the compilation is of little relevance for this chapter. For a thorough discussion and references to previous works, see Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 37–45.

57. VP/G 2, 22, 99, 120, and 136. See Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony* (1995), 165–72, and Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 45–48, 72–73.

58. Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 45–48.

Although Pachomius is born and educated as a pagan, in contrast to the other saints discussed here, he is from the beginning chosen by God and, because of his inherent virtue, both unable to worship the idols and unacceptable to the Egyptian gods.<sup>59</sup> After his conversion, away from home, he is instructed in the Christian faith and baptized, and more or less immediately he becomes a monk.<sup>60</sup> He receives his monastic education from an old ascetic, Palamon, and after about seven years, he emerges as the founder of a new monastic tradition. In the subsequent description of Pachomius's role as a leader of the *koinonia*, he is primarily a great teacher, well versed in the Scriptures and in their spiritual interpretation, but there is no indication of how he was able to study the Scriptures or learn about their interpretation. His lack of knowledge of Greek is attested by the story about how, in his old age, he made an effort to study Greek for the benefit of his Greek-speaking disciples, and his illiteracy is at least implied by the reference to him dictating his own letters.<sup>61</sup>

But, unlike in the case of Antony, his lack of education is nowhere an ideal or even something essential to the purity of his teaching. On the contrary, there is no doubt in the *Vita Pachonii* that education, literacy, and the study of Scripture were things Pachomius encouraged and even demanded. Pachomius was a holy man, not only by virtue of his *ascesis* and his visions, but even more by virtue of his discernment, his interpretation of Scripture, and his profound insights. The only passage in the *Vita Prima* that shows a manifest opposition by Pachomius to an intellectual tradition is the story about him throwing a book by Origen into the Nile (VP/G 31). There are however good reasons to regard the story as a later addition.<sup>62</sup> Compared with the *Life of St. Antony*, the complete lack of any other attack by Pachomius

59. VP/G 3. The explanation for why Pachomius was chased out of the temple by the pagan priest is revealing: it was not because the demons knew beforehand that he would become a Christian monk, but because they are opposed to anyone who is upright, as God had created him. The similarity to Antony's emphasis on inherent natural virtue is obvious.

60. Here the Greek and Coptic versions differ. The Coptic texts make Pachomius serve for three years in Sheneset before he joins Palamon, while the *Vita Prima* lets him join Palamon directly. In any case, his vision, calling him to monastic life, is in both versions described as following directly upon his baptism. See VP/G 6 and VP/Bo 9–10.

61. VP/G 95.

62. VP/G 31. The story is missing in the Coptic and Arabic versions, and in the Greek version, it is inserted into an account of Athanasius's visit to Upper Egypt.

on heretics is striking. Instead of Pachomius, it is actually Antony who in the Sahidic *Life of St. Pachomius* is said to have defended the necessity of testing the orthodoxy of monks asking for hospitality.<sup>63</sup>

The only passage in the *Life* that reveals anything of Pachomius's views of Greek philosophy is the description of the debate with the philosophers, a passage perhaps intended as a parallel to Antony's encounter with the philosophers.<sup>64</sup> But Pachomius does not himself encounter the philosophers. Instead, he sends first Cornelius, who skillfully averts the accusation of the philosophers, and then Theodore, who silences them by replying correctly to their intricate question. The story is remarkable, first, because Pachomius does not meet the attack himself, and, second, because the monks are satisfied with their ability to reply to the questions, and the philosophers apparently as satisfied with the answers they get. In contrast to the story in the *Life of Antony*, there is no real conflict, and, at least in the Greek version, no attempt by the monks to fight back or even question the philosophers. In the Coptic, more elaborate, version the monks claim that the talk of the philosophers is vain, but no argument is presented, and no discussion follows. The world of the monks in the *koinonia*, based on the Scriptures, is completely detached from the world of the pagan philosophers. In contrast to the *Life of St. Antony*, there is no common ground, there is nothing to discuss.<sup>65</sup> Thus there is no need for Pachomius to appear. His teaching is reserved for the faithful. The sound logic of Antony, based on a kind of natural revelation, is missing. It is not what is inherent in everyone but the Scriptures that form the foundation of the mental world of the *koinonia*.

Inasmuch as it is not simply a biography, but a story of the Pachomian movement, the *Life of St. Pachomius* also contains elements of two other biographies, however, those of Theodore, the second successor of Pachomius, and Theodore the Alexandrian. Here we encounter two other monks, both with a background in urban Alexandria, closer to the world of Antony, Hilarion, and Macrina. The first Theodore is from a Christian family of high standing. In contrast to

63. VP/Bo 129. The story is missing in the Greek version.

64. VP/G 82; VP/Bo 55. For a short discussion highlighting the difference between this account and the *Life of Antony*, see Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 163–67.

65. Here I find it difficult to agree with Rousseau's interpretation in his *Pachomius*, 162–69.

Antony, he is explicitly said in the Coptic version to have learnt to read and write in school and to have advanced greatly in wisdom.<sup>66</sup> His conversion to monasticism is brought about by intellectual reflection, and it is only after hearing someone recount an allegorical interpretation of the Tabernacle by Pachomius that he decides to make Pachomius his teacher.<sup>67</sup> Throughout the *Life of St. Pachomius*, he is characterized as wise and perceptive, the true heir to Pachomius.

The second Theodore was also an educated man, lector of a church of Alexandria. Upon hearing about Pachomius, he decided to become a monk. He rapidly learned Coptic, was made housemaster for the non-Egyptians (that is, for the Greeks of the Pachomian monastery), and became the faithful translator of all the teachings of Pachomius and his successor Horsiesius. He is described as diligent, intelligent, and stoutly orthodox.<sup>68</sup> In both cases there is a clear emphasis on educational responsibilities within the *koinonia*. But nowhere do we find any mention of secular learning, of Greek *paideia*. There is no explicit rejection of classical tradition, but also no place for it. Education in the Pachomian context is limited to expounding Scripture, and in contrast to the rules of Pachomius, the *Life* has very little to say about the place of books and learning in the community.<sup>69</sup>

The world of the *Life of St. Pachomius* is strangely set apart. Pachomius stands on his own; he does not relate to Greek culture and is even cautious in his relations to the church of Alexandria and its archbishop, hiding from Athanasius when he visits Upper Egypt. It is only after the death of Pachomius that relations with Alexandria are strengthened.<sup>70</sup> His monasteries are strictly guarded against dangerous influences from the outside. Hospitality is checked by testing visitors, and family relations no longer exist as such.<sup>71</sup> His learning is

66. VP/Bo 31, which gives a much fuller account than the Greek version.

67. VP/G 34, VP/Bo 29.

68. VP/G 94–95; VP/Bo 89–91.

69. For a detailed discussion of the evidence for books and scribal activity among the Pachomians, see Scholten, "Nag-Hammadi-Texte." It is significant that Scholten's evidence is almost exclusively taken from other sources than the various lives of Pachomius.

70. The caution evident in the Coptic versions is less obvious in the *Vita Prima*, in which Pachomius is made into a supporter of the bishops. See, e.g., VP/G 30–31 and VP/Bo 28. Stronger ties with Alexandria begin at about the time of Pachomius's death. See VP/G 113, 120, 136–38, 143–44, 150.

71. For the testing of visitors, see the Coptic version VP/Bo 129; for family relations, see the instructive story about Theodore's mother coming with letters from several bishops to have him handed back to her (VP/G 37).

described as confined solely to the Bible; his own instructions he receives through visions. And although his two disciples, both named Theodore, come from Alexandria, one of them even being an educated Greek, they are primarily his disciples, taught by him. Their background, like Pachomius's own, is not a problem; like family connections, it is something simply dropped when entering the monastery. Inside the monastery, there is, however, an insistence on education not found in any other fourth-century Christian context. Although this is mainly expressed in the Pachomian rules, the *Life of St. Pachomius* is already permeated by an emphasis on instruction and education. But this instruction is decidedly orthodox, and thus in no way a problem. We are here far removed from the Alexandrian philosophical tradition reflected in Gregory of Nyssa, in the letters of St. Antony, and most explicitly in Evagrius: that all letters, ideas, and concepts are to be, if not rejected, at least transcended. For monks entering the *koinonia*, there is no question of relying on inherent simplicity, on relying on true self-knowledge. Formation of souls is the explicit purpose of the community.<sup>72</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Out of the eight lives discussed, all but two inform us about the education of the saint. In all the lives, written as they were in the late fourth century A.D. or the first decade of the fifth, education means classical Greek education. This education is accepted in two of the lives by Jerome, as well as in two of the lives by Gregory of Nyssa. In Antony's case, it is rejected; in Macrina's, it is replaced. The two lives that have no reference to a *paideia* are the *Vita Pachomii* and the *Vita Malchi*. Both of them depict saints who do not belong to the Greek (or better Hellenic) culture at all, but to the Coptic and the Syriac respectively. This saves them from the problem of harmonizing Greek *paideia* and Christian saintliness. Their piety owes nothing to Greek philosophy; they are, as it were, independent. The case of Pachomius is especially revealing, because he is depicted as the great teacher and interpreter of Scripture. Still, he is not imprisoned in the world of *grammata* and *philosophia*; he does not know Greek, his letters are written in a secret

72. For a thorough discussion of this theme in the Pachomian literature, see Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 57–76.



code, and he does not have to bother about debating the philosophers of Panopolis. He belongs to another world.

In the other lives, we can detect two different approaches to classical education and its relation to the sanctity of the saint. On the one hand there is the rejection of and withdrawal from Greek *paideia* as in the *Life of St. Antony* and, although rather differently, in the *Life of St. Macrina*. In both cases the saint has a kind of inherent purity, which is to be guarded against the pollution of *grammata*. Already from the beginning, they are set apart. Their education is not of this world. This is most radically manifested in the *Life of St. Antony*, where Antony is initiated in his fortified abandoned well. It is his shrine, a protected place outside the world, outside *polis*, outside *civitas*. In the *Life of St. Macrina*, the distance is not so vividly manifest. But here again Macrina is, unlike her brothers, locked up at home, protected from the immorality of worldly education, enshrined by Scripture. Instead of traditional *paideia*, instead of the *gymnasium*, Antony and Macrina each create their own *polis* and method of instruction for teaching their disciples. If we add the second work by Gregory of Nyssa on Macrina, the *De anima et resurrectione*, we find that Macrina, like Antony, is depicted as engaging in philosophical debate, in proving that Greek philosophy is futile compared with Christian truth.<sup>73</sup> Although unaffected by classical education, they both emerge as masters of the philosophers.

On the other hand, there is the prevalent idea of Greek *paideia* being the foundation upon which Christian knowledge and piety can build. This is what we find in Jerome's two lives, and it is probably most explicitly developed in Gregory's *Life of Moses*, reflecting the educational program of Origen as described in the oration by his pupil Gregory Thaumaturgos, in whose *Life* by Gregory of Nyssa it is again echoed.<sup>74</sup> Classical education is, as in the biographies of pagan "holy men," taken for granted in anyone who is a teacher of philosophy. Like Gregory and Jerome themselves, their saints (except the woman, Macrina) are educated before they become leaders or holy men. But in contrast to Antony and Macrina, they are not made into teachers of philosophy who refute false ideas and lead their disciples into true insights. For Paul, Hilarion, Moses, and Gregory Thaumaturgos,

there is no conflict, but rather a natural cohabitation of *paideia* and *pistis*. The second rests upon the solid basis of the first. The biblical models here are Moses and Samuel, not, as in *Life of St. Antony*, Jacob and Elijah. This does not mean that there is no difference between the lives by Gregory and those by Jerome. Gregory clearly regards secular education as positive, something the saint utilizes in his life, but the secular education received by Paul and Hilarion is manifestly isolated from and irrelevant to their ascetic life. Although proud of his learning, Jerome could never really harmonize classical *paideia* and Christian faith. Classical literature remained a temptation. He loved it but thought it shameful, an infidelity to Christ. To Gregory of Nyssa, it had its beauty and its use, but also its limits.<sup>75</sup>

But, and this is important, Moses too needed to withdraw from the world. Although there is no conflict, the holy men of the *Life of St. Paul*, the *Life of St. Hilarion*, the *Life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgos*, and the *Life of Moses* all leave the world of *paideia* and experience a higher level of education. Before they can emerge as teachers, they have to leave everything behind, go out into the desert and experience a direct encounter with the divine. Like Antony, they are also taught by God, something that can only be brought about in the context of renunciation and solitude. But in contrast to Antony and Macrina, they enter their solitude, their monastic life after being initiated into philosophy by secular education. Their lives are all characterized by three phases: *education, retreat, leadership*, except that the last phase is transformed in Jerome's lives into a travel account in the case of Hilarion and into the humiliation of Antony in the case of Paul.

To conclude, I would like to suggest that the study of these lives gives an important insight into the wider question of the relation between Christianity and Greek *paideia* and the emergence of a specifically Christian culture with a Christian educational system of its own. It is in the *Vita Macrina* and the *Vita Pachomii* that we find the first traces of something Antony and even Athanasius could not yet imagine, something Jerome found hard to believe in, but that Augustine later considered natural and necessary: a purely Christian *paideia*. Instead of the illiteracy of Antony, Macrina reads her Psalter, instead of the seclusion of the shrine, Pachomius has a monastic school with

73. See Gregory of Nyssa, *De anima et resurrectione*.

74. See Gregory Thaumaturgos, *Oratio panegyrica in Origenem*.

75. For a short discussion of the difference between the attitudes of the Cappadocians on the one hand and Jerome on the other, see Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, 77–82.

lectures, libraries, and discussions. One can even argue that these two lives are, as it were, introductions to Christian traditions of teaching. In Gregory's *De anima et resurrectione*, Macrina has become the teacher of true, that is, Christian, philosophy. But in contrast to the *Life of St. Antony*, she is a teacher of a pupil asking questions, not an opponent of proud pagans. The *Life of St. Pachomius* in its turn is full of references to the writing down of Pachomius's teaching. But unlike Antony's teaching, which rests upon its own logic and is verified by the outwitted philosophers, Pachomius's teaching rests entirely on Scripture and is verified solely through his miracles, seen by his disciples. Macrina and Pachomius move in a purely Christian context.

This emerging Christian culture is first reflected in the two biographies of saints not belonging to the traditional world of Greek culture, the biographies of a woman and of a Copt. What could probably not be part of the *Life* of a holy man within the male Greek world of the late fourth and early fifth centuries could be described as the essential way for a holy woman and a non-Greek saint. Christian education as the solution to the conflict between philosophy and simplicity starts at the fringes of classical *paideia*. What has been observed by previous scholars about the emergence of a Christian educational system, Christian schools, in late antiquity, is actually substantiated by the biographies.<sup>76</sup> Within the centers of Greek culture and education, Christians did not develop their own schools but made use of and, as it were, tried to transform the pagan tradition. What had been natural in the Jewish context, seeking to preserve religious identity with the help of an independent educational system, only developed among Christians in areas where Greek was not the major language, and primarily within the context of the new monastic *civitas*, a society in which women played an important and often pioneering role.

76. See, e.g., Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*, 454–56 and 466–67.

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## 6

## Your Honor, My Reputation

*St. Gregory of Nazianzus's Funeral Oration on  
St. Basil the Great*

FREDERICK W. NORRIS

Two questions dominate any attempt to answer what parts rhetoric and history play in Gregory of Nazianzus's funeral oration on Basil of Caesarea. The first looks directly at its subtext, Gregory's reputation. He had recently resigned his presidency and bishopric in the middle (muddle) of the 381 Council of Constantinople. His reputation, built so carefully over many years, was in disarray. Furthermore, earlier pressed to stay with his little Nicene congregation as it struggled to survive in the metropolis, he had angered Basil's family by not being present at the great one's funeral. His funeral oration was delivered belatedly after the Constantinopolitan shambles, probably at the church in Caesarea on an anniversary of Basil's death.<sup>1</sup> Then what we now have as the Greek text of this piece may have gone through further refinement as Nazianzen labored on the polishing of his corpus for posterity. Subtext here struggles to be text. What does it tell us about Gregory?

The second question asks how the text honors Basil, a beloved friend whom Gregory had known as a boy in Cappadocia, lived with as a student in Athens, visited in Pontus and Caesarea, and worked with as a bishop in the eastern Mediterranean. It considers, then, the treatment and shaping of information about Basil in the attempt to praise him. What does it tell us about Basil?

## GREGORY'S REPUTATION

In the modern period, Nazianzen's star has been eclipsed, nearly obliterated in the West. Many know nothing of him. Even those who

write about him may speak of him as a lesser figure. Anthony Meredith admires aspects of Gregory's thought, but he still sees him as "a literary man and a poet rather than an Athanasius or a Basil."<sup>2</sup> Rosemary Ruether found him to be a master of rhetoric, but incapable of integrating Greek culture and Christian faith.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, judging in terms of both the traditions of Greek technical rhetoric seen in Gorgias and the various handbooks, on the one hand, and the much different philosophical rhetoric of Plato and Aristotle, on the other, George Kennedy speaks of Gregory's funeral oration on Basil as "probably the greatest piece of Greek rhetoric since the death of Demosthenes." For Kennedy, Nazianzen shows in this oration that he has combined Hellenic culture and Christian faith in a remarkable synthesis, which employs persuasive rational arguments rather than resting on religious authority alone.<sup>4</sup>

Important Byzantine writers shared Kennedy's understanding. Michael Psellos praises much of Gregory's literary style. John of Sicily knew classical commentaries on the work of the famous rhetorician Hermogenes of Tarsus that illustrated the arguments with phrases from speeches by Demosthenes. In his own commentary on Hermogenes' treatise *On Ideas*, however, John replaced numerous citations of Demosthenes with hundreds from Nazianzen. Indeed, he asserts that Gregory "excelled Plato in the virtues of speech as much as he did in theology, and he made Demosthenes seem a mere child."<sup>5</sup>

Elias of Crete insisted that Nazianzen drank deeply from both Aristotle and Hermogenes.<sup>6</sup> I have suggested elsewhere that Gregory's works, *Or.* 33 as an example, may be analyzed productively by using Hermogenes' *Peri tōn staseōn* as the background for his choosing and organizing arguments.<sup>7</sup> He commands rhetoric. To turn Georges Florovsky's rebuttal to Adolf Harnack in a somewhat different direction, Nazianzen Christianized Hellenism rather than Hellenizing

2. Meredith, *Cappadocians*, 46. For Meredith, Gregory has some arguments of merit, when they are "new" and "influential."

3. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 156–75.

4. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*, 237.

5. Mayer, "Psellos' Reden." Poynton, "Gregory of Nazianzus and the Greek Rhetoricians," identifies nearly one hundred references to Gregory's funeral oration on Basil alone in John of Sicily's commentary on Hermogenes' *On Ideas* (ed. C. Walz, *Rhetores Graeci*, 6: 56–504). Walz, *Rhetores Graeci*, 6: 99.

6. The Latin translation by Leunclavius, *Gregorius Nazianzenus: Operum tomus tres*, 94–122, makes this clear.

7. See my "The Theologian and Rhetorical Technique."

1. *Orat.* 43, ed. Bernardi, *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours* 42–43, 25–37.

Christianity by insightfully seeing that the helpmate of theology was rhetoric in its richest developments and not philosophy in its diminutive dependence upon syllogisms.<sup>8</sup>

The logic involved in Gregory's work is a type developed primarily by those who admired and understood rhetoric. It depends upon reading the Aristotelian corpus in terms of a manuscript tradition still available at least to later Syriac- and Arabic-speaking commentators, that is, one in which both the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* are considered part of the logical treatises. That fits the *Rhetoric*, which defines one use of enthymematic argument as the way to deal with the great number of human issues for which there are only probable answers.<sup>9</sup> The point here, then, is that Nazianzen worked profoundly within a tradition of Hellenic culture and education, carefully plucking its roses, while avoiding what to him were thorns.<sup>10</sup> He apparently knew a manuscript tradition of Aristotle that described what logical argument was much more fully than medieval Western appropriation of the so-called Aristotelian logical treatises. He did not attack his theological opponents so much for appropriating Aristotle as for appropriating Aristotle wrongly.

Gregory's view of logic suggested to him that theology is a probability science, more allied to rhetorical persuasion and literary expression than to dry deductive demonstrations. His claim that the best theologians are those who provide poignant images tells us much about his sense of theology and the ancient Church's sense of who the good theologians were.<sup>11</sup> Within little more than sixty years after his death, bishops at the Council of Chalcedon referred to Nazianzen

8. In my *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 17–39, I have spelled out how these issues shaped Nazianzen's efforts.

9. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, ed. Ross, 1356A–1359B, 1394B. See Sprute, *Die Enthymemtheorie der aristotelischen Rhetorik*.

10. See my "Of Thorns and Roses."

11. Or. 30.17, PG 36.125B–C; ed. Paul Gallay, *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 27–31 (Discours Théologiques)*, 262. In Wickham's translation, Norris, *Faith*, 274, Gregory claims that: "Our noblest theologian is not one who has discovered the whole—our earthly shackles do not permit us the whole—but one whose mental image is by comparison fuller, who has gathered in his mind a richer picture, outline, or whatever we call it, of the truth." Kathleen Norris, an American poet, says in *The Cloister Walk*, 11, "The discipline of poetry teaches poets, at least, that they often have to say things they can't pretend to understand." She tells, 31–46, the story of her difficulty in dealing with academics, particularly theologians gathered with her at an institute, who made her feel stupid because she could not explain fully all the imagery she used. That kind of academic theology is the type that finds Nazianzen so muddled.

as "The Theologian,"<sup>12</sup> a name used only for him and the author of the Gospel of John. He was noted for his theological prowess as a philosophical rhetorician and was viewed neither as a hack nor as a muddled thinker. Indeed, phrases in his autobiography rather subtly hint that he may have been offered one of the favored teaching positions in rhetoric at Athens.<sup>13</sup> He was thus highly regarded both in the Church and in academe.

But as our estimation of his reputation rises, so does the power of the subtext in this oration. Nazianzen's sense of himself and his sensitivity to his recent rejection at Constantinople made him all the more anxious to enhance his reputation. This funeral oration has been difficult to categorize in terms of genre because it was written by a master rhetorician. Reuther calls it an *encomium* because it lacks a *threnos* and a *paramythētikos*.<sup>14</sup> Kennedy sees it as an *epitaphios*, given well after the funeral,<sup>15</sup> and as neither a *paramythētikos* nor a *monodia*, which expresses the grief felt nearest the death. Nazianzen says that he has been delayed in giving it by pressing Church events at Constantinople. Those concerns were real and threatening.<sup>16</sup> Yet if it is an *epitaphios*, it is one in which Menander is not slavishly followed: there is no consolation, and a description of the funeral is included, a feature that Menander describes as part of a *monodia*. Kennedy is taken by the remarkable development of the piece, the use of particular figures and the level of Attic Greek employed, as well as sparkling Christian and biblical images. For him it is a strong example of "the synthesis of classical and Christian cultural traditions into a harmonious whole," something that must have been at least one of the speech's goals, in achieving which both subtext and text work together.<sup>17</sup>

Some years ago Jean Bernardi pointed out another goal of this oration.<sup>18</sup> The text is meant to exemplify an honorable bishop and to show that Basil is worthy of emulation, but it also involves Nazianzen's reputation. He found episcopal office crushing and many bishops mediocre in education, piety, and practice. Yet in Or. 2, an apology

12. *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* 2, 1, 3, 114, 4.

13. *De vita sua*, 245–64, PG 37: 1045–47; ed. Jungck, *Gregor von Nazianz: De vita sua*, 66; ed. White, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Autobiographical Poems*, 28.

14. Reuther, *Gregory*, 120.

15. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric*, 229; Menander in Walz, *Rhetores Graeci*, 3.419.

16. Or. 43.2, PG 36: 497A; ed. Bernardi, 120.

17. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric*, 230.

18. Bernardi, *Prédication des Pères Cappadociens*, 238–46.

for his flight to Pontus when his father wanted to ordain him as a priest, he had constructed a view of the priesthood that had considerable merit. St. John Chrysostom used it as a source for his own oration *On the Priesthood*.<sup>19</sup> According to Gregory, no one should be forced to become a priest. It was a high calling, one that must be accepted only with the utmost seriousness.

He did not see proper moral discipline involved in the lives of many bishops. Or. 42, his resignation speech at the Council of Constantinople, once again demonstrates his naïveté concerning ecclesiastical politics. Bishops from Alexandria and Macedonia, arriving late at the council, charged Nazianzen with having already been a bishop elsewhere—probably related to his appointment at Sasima by Basil. He had not served in Sasima and had only been an adjutant bishop to his father at Nazianzus. But he was both hurt and angry that the charges were brought. He resigned in some haste, although not without spending appropriate time on his final oration there. In it, he scolded bishops, who were too often fickle, lacking in piety and virtue, visiting the games and public places when they should have been about their pastoral work, particularly for the poor.<sup>20</sup> If his funeral oration for Basil was presented on January 1, 382, his resignation speech at Constantinople would still have been fresh in his mind. Indeed, he uses some of the same terminology in ridiculing immature students he and Basil had known at Athens that he had employed in vilifying the bishops who attacked him at Constantinople.<sup>21</sup>

With this goal of offering the perfect model for episcopacy, we receive a rather weighty reason for Gregory's textual rebukes of both his father and Basil in this funeral oration.<sup>22</sup> First, the best of human examples will fail in reaching perfection as a bishop. But, second, Nazianzen was still smarting from his loss at Constantinople. A good bishop would be like his father and particularly like Basil, but would also neither demand ordination to the priesthood of any reluctant candidate nor abuse friendship by appointing someone to an episco-

19. Or. 2, PG 35: 408A–513C, ed. Bernardi, *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours* 1–3, 84–240; John Chrysostom, PG 47: 623–92; ed. Malingrey, *Sur le Sacerdoce*, 60–418.

20. Or. 42.1, 22, 24, 26, PG 36: 457A–C, 484B–485A, 488A–C, 489B–492A; ed. Bernardi, 48–50, 96–100, 102–6, 108–12.

21. Cf. references in n. 20 above and Basil's life of virtue in Or. 43.2, 12, 21, 34–36, 60–66, PG 36: 496B–497A, 509A–512A, 524A–C, 541B–545B, 573B–585A; ed. Bernardi, 118–20, 140–42, 166–70, 200–206, 254–72.

22. Or. 43.58–59, PG 36: 569C–573B; ed. Bernardi, 248–52.

pal post because of a ghastly ecclesiastical struggle. The subtext is clear. On those two points, anyone desiring to be the best kind of bishop should follow Gregory's own sensibilities. Once again, he defends his reputation, this time as a more compassionate bishop than either his father or Basil, at least at these two points.<sup>23</sup>

#### BASIL'S HONOR

This oration is about Basil, renowned bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. As we have it, it is a remarkable example of Greek rhetoric. It is long enough for there to be debate about its having been delivered in public; perhaps it was reworked as it now stands, or represents a speech never delivered.<sup>24</sup> Because it is designed to demonstrate Nazianzen's delicate rhetorical refinement and serve as a model for what a bishop should be, it is an especially prickly source for a biography of the Caesarean. There is never any doubt that Gregory is using all his rhetorical skills to fashion a piece that will not only honor his friend but also enhance his own reputation in ways that those who know him expect and in some that they may not.

Basil has left us no autobiography, but Philip Rousseau's *Basil of Caesarea* (1994), which sketches his life based on his orations and letters, notes that these sources are self-serving, in that they paint a picture of Basil that he wanted known. In any case, comparing any biography with its subject's autobiography, we are at a loss to know which writer is to be taken most seriously. We may well renounce any sense of historicist objectivity and opt for a postmodern approach.<sup>25</sup>

From that perspective, we should also look at least to Gregory's other funeral orations for comparison, which provide a partial control in assessing the historical value of his ode to Basil. These encomia allow us to see how he uses the form. The oration on Cyprian demonstrates that he could gather tales from odd sources and assemble

23. Bernardi, *Discours* 42–43, 25–37, discusses some of the same issues. The importance of Ors. 42 and 43 being treated together is reflected in the decision of the editors to include them in this same SC volume.

24. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric*, 230. Bernardi, *Discours* 42–43, 27, suggests that it was probably given as it is on the third anniversary of Basil's death, January 1, 382, in Caesarea of Cappadocia. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 3, n. 2, offers a date in August or September 381.

25. See my "Black Marks on the Communities' Manuscripts."

them in ways that create confusion. Information about both Cyprian of Carthage and Cyprian of Antioch is conflated in the piece.<sup>26</sup> The one on Athanasius gives little indication that Nazianzen knew him well, although he did study in Alexandria. His portrayal of Athanasius stands alongside other hagiographical pieces, particularly the representations of Athanasius's own views of himself and those who saw him as an "orthodox" hero.<sup>27</sup>

Rousseau notes that Basil does not emphasize the importance of his family in the way Gregory of Nazianzus does.<sup>28</sup> Considering Basil's silence about his family, the question of whether a friend who knew that family should be believed is difficult to answer (especially when Basil's brother Gregory of Nyssa insists on their sister Macrina's influence). What Nazianzen says in similar orations about members of his own family may help us understand his view of how families form an individual's life. We know from Gregory's eulogies for his father, sister, and brother that he emphasized his mother's place in his father's conversion and life as a bishop, as well as insisting that both sister and brother owed their character and virtue to the influence of their parents.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps, in composing his funeral oration on the Caesarean, Nazianzen could think of no one close to him who was not indebted to family for what that person had become. Having traveled to Basil's Pontus estate and mingled there with members of Basil's family (whom he may also have met earlier), he clearly grasped what was needed for a proper *epitaphios*, taking into account his own sense of self. Family mattered to Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa. It may also have mattered deeply to Basil. In that case, his silence on the subject once more speaks of his complexity and his concern to construct a public view of himself.

In an exceptionally well-crafted set of stories, Nazianzen tells how, faced with persecution, Basil's wealthy forebears left their estates and sought safety in the forest, where they eventually learned that they

26. Or. 24, PG 35: 1169A–1193C; ed. Mossay, *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 24–26*, 40–84. Delehay, "Cyprien d'Antioche et Cyprien de Carthage"; Nock, "Cyprian of Antioch"; Mossay, *Discours 24–26*, 9–24.

27. Or. 21, PG 35: 1081A–1128C; ed. Mossay, *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 20–23*, 110–92.

28. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 6.

29. Or. 18, PG 35: 985A–1044A. Ors. 7 & 8, PG 35: 756A–816D; ed. Calvet-Sebasti, *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 6–12*, 180–298.

were well cared for by God in nature. This smacks suspiciously of hagiography, but Nazianzen avoids the less believable devices of that genre. He may have heard such stories talking with members of the family in Pontus.<sup>30</sup>

In asking to what extent Nazianzen's rhetorical prowess has shaped events, both trimming and changing them, we must allow not only for Gregory's skill as a speaker but also for the interests of his audience. Nazianzen does not always reach for the best rhetorical effect if the story, which might also be known to others, ends on a sour note.<sup>31</sup> As Kennedy observes, the literary impact of the story about the emperor's child being brought back from severe illness by Basil is weakened because the child died.<sup>32</sup> Gregory blames the death on the family's attacking Basil. We do not know if the tales of the Caesarean's forebears in the forests of Cappadocia also had a wide and knowledgeable enough audience to keep Nazianzen's rhetorical powers in check. But we do know that his reputation might well have been sullied had he included stories that Basil's own family could refute.

Rousseau notes that Basil the Great carefully reconstructs his life as a student and young man in order to pass over his dependence on Apollinaris and Eustathius of Sebaste.<sup>33</sup> Is Gregory's silence about those early teachers of Basil itself part of a crafted quiet that the Caesarean himself promoted? Nazianzen mentions no Christian instructors of Basil other than Basil's own family members. But the same is true of his other funeral orations. No Christian teacher is named either in his confused panegyric on Cyprian<sup>34</sup> or in his oration on Athanasius.<sup>35</sup> Gregory's father learns the faith from his wife; both his sister and brother are taught the faith at home.<sup>36</sup> Thus it cannot be claimed that Nazianzen does not mention Apollinaris and Eustathius of Sebaste in order to keep the checkered history of the Caesarean's Chris-

30. Or. 43.5–8, PG 36: 500B–504A; ed. Bernardi, 124–30.

31. Or. 43.54, PG 36: 564C–565B; ed. Bernardi, 236–40.

32. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric*, 235.

33. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 233–69. Apollinaris the Younger (ca. 315–92), bishop of Laodicea in Syria, taught that Jesus Christ was fully divine but not fully human. Eustathius of Sebaste (ca. 300–377) taught that Christ's nature was similar to but not the same as God the Father's nature. Basil stood against both positions.

34. Or. 24, PG 35: 1169A–1193C; ed. Mossay, 40–84.

35. Or. 21.6, PG 35: 1088B–C; ed. Mossay, 120–22.

36. Or. 18.5, 7–12, 16, PG 35: 989C–992B, 992D–1000C, 1004C–1005B; Or. 7 & 8, PG 35: 756A–816D; ed. Calvet-Sebasti, 180–298.

tian mentors out of public view. He does not mention such teachers for anyone; indeed, he hardly mentions his own Christian teachers.<sup>37</sup>

I see little reason not to take Gregory seriously when he sketches Basil's formal education outside the family and within Hellenistic institutions. Again referring to the set of comparable encomia, in the odd piece on Cyprian and his oration on Athanasius, there is little information about family background or education. Nazianzen insists that Athanasius was involved in "brief study of literature and philosophy, in order not to lack skill in those areas or be deficient in the knowledge of what he intended to despise." Athanasius preferred the Old Testament to such vanities and immersed himself in religious practices.<sup>38</sup>

There is an increase in information and probable reliability as we move toward Gregory's inner circle. In the oration on his sister Gorgonia, he speaks of their parents as Abraham and Sarah who brought their daughter to faith. Her native land was the heavenly Jerusalem and her virtues were many. No mention is made of formal education. Her ability to read and think clearly may be assumed; her advice was coveted by men as well as women.<sup>39</sup> Nazianzen's father is described as rising from a family that occupied no high social position. Yet in some odd ways his father was already involved in Christian virtue, perhaps in part because of his upbringing among the non-Christian Hypsistarii. He had lost his mother and property, but grew morally because of it. Under the influence of his wife, he learned the name to put on the deeds that already marked his life. Little is said of his formal education within the oration.<sup>40</sup>

The eulogy that most resembles the oration for Basil is the one given in honor of his brother Caesarius. In that panegyric, Gregory again notes that his father and mother were crucial influences and then mentions the education of Caesarius in Nazianzus and Alexandria. Gregory's brother was always a quick student and industrious; he ex-

37. He names a few in epitaphs or poetry, notably the boyhood tutor in Cappadocian Caesarea, Carterius (PG 38: 70–71, PG 37: 1461), the grammarian Thespesius met in Palestinian Caesarea (PG 38: 12–13), and the Athenian Christian rhetorician, Prohaeresius (PG 38: 13).

38. Or. 21.6, PG 35: 1088B; ed. Mossay, 120.

39. Or. 8.4–11, PG 35: 793A–801C; ed. Calvet-Sebasti, 252–70. "Open ears" for the divine word could well mean reading aloud.

40. Or. 18.5–7, PG 35: 989C–993A.

celled in geometry and astronomy, in arithmetic and higher mathematics, and particularly in medicine.<sup>41</sup>

These differences in the descriptions of his family's formal studies imply that Gregory was not a slave to the rhetorical convention of filling in a detailed blank for the educational background of each person.<sup>42</sup> Less might be expected to be said about his sister, because family money was not spent on sending her abroad for study. Yet in both his home and Basil's, women were highly honored.<sup>43</sup> Nazianzen may have known little about Athanasius's training; he may have known more of the elder Gregory's background and chosen not to use it. But he evidently sensed that he could not praise either Caesarius or Basil without indicating their educational pedigree. And in comparing the two, we notice that the emphasis on rhetoric, philosophy, and grammar found in the description of Basil's training, although perhaps general,<sup>44</sup> is absent in the case of Caesarius. Basil is, however, described as mastering astronomy, geometry, "numerical propositions," and medicine, because of his own sickly nature, features almost exactly like those attributed to Caesarius.<sup>45</sup> Basil's interest in medicine may have been genuine and may have had other consequences. His brother, Gregory of Nyssa, interpreted the Platonic tradition through philosophical medical tracts and used that interpretation against Eunomius. The study of medicine was thus no casual pursuit, either for reasons of health or theology.<sup>46</sup>

#### REPUTATION VERSUS HONOR

Subtext and text, Gregory's reputation and Basil's honor, are occasionally at war. We can see that most clearly when we have first looked at the more peaceful interchanges. Nazianzen is an actor in the stories that he tells concerning his and Basil's stay in Athens. At first read-

41. Or. 7.7, PG 35: 761B–764A; ed. Calvet-Sebasti, 192–96.

42. Pernot, *Rhétorique de l'éloge*, 134–78, sketches that blank. Soffel, *Die Regeln Menanders*, 254, lists a number of places in which Nazianzen depends upon Menander's rules.

43. Harrison, "Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology."

44. Or. 43.13, PG 36: 512A–B; ed. Bernardi, 142–46.

45. Or. 43.23, PG 36: 525C–528C; ed. Bernardi, 172–76.

46. Barnes, "Power of God," shows how medical texts—particularly from Galen—became important interpretive tools for the Platonic corpus, especially *Republic* 509B, and formed the core of the use of *dynamis* in Gregory of Nyssa's attack on Eunomius.



ing we are impressed by the remarkable friendship the two share; they are closer than brothers in living a common life. They may have met at school in Cappadocia, but it is to their studies together at the great center of higher learning in Greece that Gregory's *epitaphios* focuses on. Nazianzen's descriptions tend to ring true when compared with descriptions by Libanius and Eunapius of such schools located elsewhere.<sup>47</sup> Without specifying much about the Caesarean's studies before his arrival at Athens, Nazianzen notes that stories of Basil's prowess preceded him. Although the hazing of new students was a common occurrence, one that redeemed itself by making the newcomer eventually feel fully accepted, any hazing of Basil seemed from Gregory's perspective to be unworthy of his friend's attainments. Later, when some Armenians drew the Caesarean into a rhetorical contest, Nazianzen went along with it, but then changed his mind and, by adding the weight of his own talents, helped Basil put the Armenians to flight. Basil is honored; Gregory's reputation is enhanced. Basil without Gregory is less than he might have been. The Caesarean might have won on his own, but together they are invincible.<sup>48</sup>

Even in the sections about Athens, however, we begin to see important differences between the two friends. Their views on the nature and merit of Hellenistic education are not the same. Gregory is saddened by Basil's distaste for his time spent in Greece. The Caesarean does not value the tools that Greek *paideia* gives the Christian nearly as much as Nazianzen does, certainly not publicly as a bishop, and probably not as a person.<sup>49</sup> Basil is honored, but Gregory's reputation is glorified. The Theologian's view, here stated so well, is only partially shared by Basil the Great:

I take it all intelligent men agree that among human advantages education holds first place. I refer not only to our nobler form of it which disdains all the ambitious ornaments of rhetoric and attaches itself only to salvation and the beauty of what is accessible to the mind, but also that external culture which many Christians by an error of judgment scorn as treacherous and dangerous and as turning us away from God. . . . We have adopted [from non-Christian usage]

47. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 29–31.

48. Or. 43.17–18, PG 36: 517B–520C; ed. Bernardi, 156–62.

49. Basil's knowledge of the Hellenic heritage is impressive. Amand de Mendieta, "Official Attitude of Basil of Caesarea," looks at Basil's *Hexameron* for his view of rejection. He distinguishes that from Basil's personal view, which breathes Hellenic air, but I am not convinced that Basil breathed it as deeply as Gregory.

principles of inquiry and speculation, while we have rejected whatever leads to demons, and error, and the abyss of perdition. And from such material we have drawn profit for piety, by learning to distinguish the better from the worse, and from its weakness we have made our own doctrine strong.<sup>50</sup>

A "disdain" for the "ornaments of rhetoric" is itself the mark of a well-educated orator, particularly one who fits the mold of a philosophical rhetorician. Anti-intellectualism, a fear of higher education, was certainly a strong feature of some Christians. Gregory firmly believed, however, that adopting the Greek "principles of inquiry and speculation" found in the better-known Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic schools, among others, while avoiding Greek paths to perdition, allowed the committed Christian intellectual to both strengthen Christian claims to truth and weaken his community's enemies.<sup>51</sup> Elias of Crete mentions so many philosophers upon whom Nazianzen depended, some not described in our encyclopedias because of the destruction of Constantinople's libraries in 1204 and 1453, that I suspect Gregory had more than a handbook knowledge of several philosophers.<sup>52</sup> Various epistemologists used those technical words for "inquiry and speculation" in their investigations. And it was the Neoplatonists especially who praised the technical rhetoricians like Hermogenes, who gave them principles for dealing with various human problems often contested in forums and courts.<sup>53</sup>

Nazianzen did not accept Hellenism in toto. He had chided his non-Nicene opponents for following Aristotle rather than the fishermen, a fine Greek turn of phrase.<sup>54</sup> He also wrote letters to Ablabius and Gregory of Nyssa warning them about the dangers of putting virtue at risk by becoming full-time teachers of sophistic rhetoric.<sup>55</sup>

50. Or. 43.11, PG 36: 508B–509A; ed. Bernardi, 136–40. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 38, has so adapted the translation of McCauley, *Funeral Orations*, 11–12; in the brackets I have changed his "pagan" to "non-Christian."

51. Wyss, "Gregor II," mentions a number of philosophers known to us whose works Gregory employed.

52. Reading Elias's comments on Gregory's orations in *Gregorius Nazianzenus: Opera tomii tres*, ed. Leunclavius, provides a full picture.

53. Lloyd, "Neoplatonic Logic and Aristotelian Logic."

54. Or. 23.12, PG 35: 1164C; ed. Mossay, 304. In Or. 27.10, PG 35: 24C; ed. Gallay, *Discours* 27–31, 96–98; Or. 32.25, PG 36: 201C; ed. Gallay, *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours* 32–36, 136, and *Poemata Moralia X, de virtute* 48–49, PG 37: 684, he attacks the superficiality of Aristotle's technical logic.

55. Ep. 233 to Ablabius and Ep. 11, PG 37: 376B–377B, 42B–44B; ed. Gallay, *Gregor von Nazianz: Die Briefe*, 167, 13–14.

But he found much value in non-Christian works and could say in this present oration that he had always liked the city of Athens and what it stood for more than Basil did.<sup>56</sup> The Caesarean's treatise on the education of boys has been attacked by N. G. Wilson as misreading, misrepresenting, and then refuting pieces of Greek literature.<sup>57</sup> Basil makes his judgments on the basis of whether or not particular treatises espoused virtue similar to that of Christians. His is a confident piece, but not a particularly penetrating one. In his first epistle, he has an aside about his dislike of Athens, yet there he uses Greek learning for his own purposes. Although he attacks Eunomius for being dependent upon Aristotle,<sup>58</sup> he employs the latest science and knew a good bit of philosophy. His corpus offers clear evidence of his remarkable rhetorical education.<sup>59</sup>

The Caesarean deserved Nazianzen's praise. Well-versed in Greek literature, much like the second-century Tatian, who attacked Greek philosophy through Greek rhetoric, Basil drank deeply at Greek wells and was thoroughly refreshed, but nonetheless complained about the water.<sup>60</sup> The Caesarean's entire corpus and that of Nazianzen are similar and confirming, as are the comments made in this oration about their views of Athens. Although appropriating Athenian culture and education was a thorny task, Gregory found more roses than did Basil, and Basil found many. Nazianzen strengthens his reputation as he honors his friend. In his enthusiasm and yet rather careful selection of tales to tell and ways to tell them, he created a fuller synthesis between Hellenic culture and Christian faith. Indeed, this oration, probably as much as any other, shows how far his Christian-

56. Or. 43.11, PG 36: 508B–509A; ed. Bernardi, 136–38, offers praise of non-Christian literature; also see Or. 43.14, 17–18, 21, PG 36: 513A–C, 517B–520C, 524A–C; ed. Bernardi, 146–48, 156–62, 166–70. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 39, says “Basil displayed less enthusiasm and greater caution.” Basil was less passionate in his attacks on non-Christians than Gregory was, particularly in Ors. 4–5, PG 35: 532A–720A; ed. Bernardi, *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 4–5*, 86–380.

57. Wilson, ed., *St. Basil on the Value of Greek Literature*.

58. Basil, *Contra Eunomium* 1.5, 9, PG 29: 516B–C, 532A–533C; ed. Sesboüé, *Basile de Césarée: Contre Eunome*, 1: 173–75, 198–204.

59. Rist, “Basil's ‘Neoplatonism,’” shows that Basil eventually did study some of Plotinus's *Enneads*. Kustas, “Saint Basil and the Rhetorical Tradition,” spells out how thoroughly Basil represented the best of rhetorical education in his age.

60. Ep. 1, in *Saint Basile: Lettres*, ed. Courtonne, 1: 3; Ep. 223, in *ibid.* 3: 10. Wifstrand, *Alte Kirche und die griechische Bildung*, carefully shows how Tatian had received a deeper philosophical education than Justin and employed Hellenistic rhetoric to attack Hellenic values.

izing of Hellenism had progressed. Oratory was becoming an expected work of the Church, one that depended upon and extended Hellenistic rhetoric.<sup>61</sup> This piece can be viewed as the high point in that process, one not reached by Basil. But it is seldom read as a total success. Gregory genuinely revered his friend, but painfully points out the Caesarean's weaknesses in ways that have harmed his own reputation. He often strikes modern readers as too sensitive and overwrought.

The passion involved, however, creates a liveliness that defeats any possibility of boredom. The most important emotional outburst comes from his remembrance of Basil appointing him to the bishopric at Sasima.<sup>62</sup> For Gregory, this was a denial of their friendship, which he so strongly praises in other sections of this oration and elsewhere. As odd as it seems in a funeral oration, the section was tempered for the occasion. He claims that he cannot avoid mentioning it because it has had such a profound effect upon him. It had given him considerable pain and weakened his ability to attain his own goals in the philosophic (monastic) life. Yet in comparison with the more fiery remarks in his later autobiographical poetry about his disbelief that Basil could have acted in such a callous way, his comments here are rather tame.<sup>63</sup>

There is a fury in Nazianzen that is directed especially at those who misuse ecclesiastical power. In the funeral oration for his father, and even more in his poetry, he rails against Gregory the elder for dragooning him into the priesthood and later putting him into leadership as an auxiliary bishop. He praises both his parents, but rebukes them as tyrannical for forcing him into the priesthood.<sup>64</sup> After resigning from the Council of Constantinople, he lampooned the bishops there as screaming flocks of crows or swarms of wasps attacking one's face and then wrote a cousin that such councils are dangerous for the soul.<sup>65</sup> He is touchy when his motives are impugned, and

61. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*.

62. Or. 43.59, PG 36: 572C–573B; ed. Bernardi, 252–54. In Ep. 21, ed. Courtonne, 1: 52, Basil had indicated that he preferred the anger of a loved one to the flattery of anyone else.

63. *De vita sua*, 365–485, PG 37: 1054–62; ed. Jungck, 72–76; ed. White, 36–46. Gregory sees Basil as becoming the embodiment of error during this affair.

64. Or. 18.37, PG 35: 1033C–1035B; *De vita sua*, 337–67, 486–560, PG 37: 1052–54, 1062–68; ed. Jungck, 70–72, 76–80; ed. White, 34–36.

65. *De vita sua*, 1680–89, PG 37: 1116–17; ed. Jungck, 136; ed. White, 132–34. Ep. 130, PG 37: 226A–B; ed. Galloway, 95–96.

wounded when Church leaders do not accept his view of what a bishop should be. Although his understanding of ecclesiastical politics is certainly naïve, the positions he takes on episcopacy are defensible. He was badly treated by bishops for rather sorry reasons.

The way in which he states his disappointment in this oration, although carefully controlled and offering a defense of Basil's painfully mistreating a friend because of his commitment to the Church, and thus to ecclesiastical politics, may not have been persuasive. Here the subtext has overpowered the text. Vulnerable Gregory, forced to sacrifice his own desire to be a monk separated from ecclesiastical squabbles, can still praise his "friend." Although Nazianzen comes across as less than a forgiving friend, in terms of any biography of the Caesarean, these sentences alert us to Basil the Great's own insensitivity about his manner of fighting for the faith. Basil tried to manipulate Gregory on the basis of friendship, and in terms of looking deeply into Basil's character, the very expression of such disappointment by Gregory within the genre of a funeral oration heightens our recognition of this flaw in the Caesarean. Full honor is only appropriate for a fully honorable life.

The accounts of Basil's elevation to the bishopric of Caesarea, however, give some indication of how Nazianzen limited his anger and did not totally change his judgment about his friend. The subtext does not obliterate the text. In a rather subtle way, he knows that his reputation will not be enhanced if he destroys Basil's honor. In the encomium for his father, he describes at some length how the elder Gregory had supported Eusebius of Caesarea and Basil in their respective ascents to the bishop's throne.<sup>66</sup> There is no outstanding difference in the description in the oration honoring Basil<sup>67</sup> despite the fact that the horrifying call to Sasima had intervened. He does not take the opportunity to play up the questionable aspects of Basil's election, even though he clearly knew it was contested.

In attempting to assess the battle between his own reputation and the honor of his friend, Gregory's most interesting silence concerns Basil's trip to Egypt and Palestine, and perhaps also to Syria and Mesopotamia, to see the monastic communities there. That was a

66. *Or.* 18.33–36, *PG* 35: 1028B–1033C.

67. *Or.* 43.37, *PG* 36: 545B–548A; ed. Bernardi, 206–8.

crucial journey for Basil, one that informed his valued monastic rule. Two aspects of Nazianzen's own life probably lie behind this silence. First, he repeatedly says that he himself had always preferred monastic seclusion. During one important period, the time in which he began to see the problem with Apollinaris's Christology, he was secluded within the community of St. Thecla in Seleucia. Gregory never seemed to be able to make the best sense of how one who preferred the quiet of monastic contemplation was to serve God through his golden gifts of public oratory. Second, Basil's trip to monastic centers seems to have been connected with his early departure from Athens, a departure that stunned Gregory and left him feeling betrayed. Perhaps there was enough pain involved in the creation of an oration that spoke carefully about the Sasima incident without dwelling on an earlier moment of abandonment. He may not have found a way for the subtext and text to coexist in describing these events.

#### CONCLUSION

Nazianzen's ode to the Caesarean displays the fascinating interplay between rhetoric and history. It is a fairly reliable source for Basil's life. Gregory's rhetorical flourish does not disqualify his work. Its silences are acute, but its statements are helpful. Taken in concert with Basil's work and Gregory's other funeral orations, pertinent orations, and autobiographical poetry, a believable picture of both men emerges.

Some have described Gregory as a muddled thinker, but his project for Christianizing Hellenic culture resonates with mastery when the relationships among philosophy, rhetoric, and theology are known. The most important contributions of Gregory's funeral oration to any biography of Basil are two: first, the way in which both its style and its story genuinely present Basil as a figure usually to be emulated, and, second, the comparison by which it highlights Gregory as the more thorough Christianizer of Hellenism. The subtext is clearer than the text. Gregory loves Greek culture more passionately than does Basil and creates a more interesting integration of things Greek and things Christian than does the Caesarean. He thus secures his reputation and at the same time honors Basil.

Nazianzen has been viewed as a hypersensitive whiner, someone

too often depressed.<sup>68</sup> Yet even his raw nerves are not to be casually impugned. A father who forces his son into the priesthood and episcopacy, a friend who uses one as a pawn in ecclesiastical chess, and a group of bishops who slyly force one's resignation would drive nearly anyone of virtue and discernment to distraction, perhaps even to publicly expressed outrage. Yet Gregory's gnawing sense of failure at what he wanted to accomplish, so vividly portrayed in his poetry near the end of his life, suggests that when we deal with his grief at opportunities lost and reputation eroded, we must come to it with a modicum of disdain for his occasional carping self-interest. Gregory's biggest weakness was his inability to lead the life of a bishop and handle its burdens. He could not stomach raw ecclesiastical politics. His greatest muddle was his self-described middle way between monasticism and episcopacy, which brought him no relief, at least in part because he was not politically adept.<sup>69</sup>

As a historical source for Basil's life, this oration has marked deficiencies. Gregory rather oddly mentions nothing of Basil's trip to Egypt and Palestine to see monasticism in operation and only haltingly speaks of Basil's great achievements as a churchman. We are in Rousseau's debt because he listens to Nazianzen but employs the Caesarean's own works to show that Basil's claw is covered in rich velvet. That lush covering royally displays a deep understanding of the nature of the Church and is softly compassionate in its handling of the oppressed. Gregory praises Basil's greatness and does not mention all he might have, yet he avoids a fawning performance by pointing out that he had felt the claw. His subtext gives clarity to the text. Defending his reputation put Basil's deserved honor in perspective.

68. Bernardi, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze*, 345–48, plays with the French *dépressif* in order to make the point.

69. The middle way is described in his poetry, *De vita sua*, 310–11, PG 37: 1051, ed. Jungck, 68, ed. White, 32. For Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 235–36, Gregory's muddled thinking is especially revealed when he tries to please his father by becoming a priest and then a bishop. Family loyalty often brings pain and creates what appears to be mindless allegiance, yet in context it makes sense.

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## 7

## How to Praise a Friend

St. Gregory of Nazianzus's Funeral Oration for  
St. Basil the Great

DAVID KONSTAN

It remains a controversial question why some Christian writers in late antiquity eschewed the traditional language of friendship, expressed as a relationship between *philoï* or *amici*, and preferred instead the vocabulary of *agapē* and *caritas* or else that of kinship (for example, brotherhood), while others availed themselves liberally of the rhetoric of friendship. The difference in usage appears clearly, for example, in the writings of the Cappadocian fathers Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil of Caesarea. Thus Kurt Treu observes:

Although Basil, under "friendship," clearly distinguishes between *philia* and *agapē*, and employs *philia* with various reservations but only *agapē* in an unequivocally positive way, Gregory of Nazianzus uses *philia* almost exclusively for the same semantic territory. It is not oversubtle to perceive in this an expression of a deeper difference between the two friends. . . . Basil is more strongly tied to the ecclesiastical heritage, from which *agapē* derives, whereas Gregory remains more uninhibited in his debt to the ancient Greek tradition, in which *philia* is at home.<sup>1</sup>

Gregory, too, like his peers, freely refers to the faithful as brothers, but he is perfectly clear about what constitutes the bond of friendship: "By friends [*philoï*] I mean those who are noble and good and bound to ourselves by virtue [*aretē*], since we too have some part in that" (Ep. 39.1; cf. 39.4).

Various explanations have been proposed for the reticence on the

part of some Christians in respect to the terminology of *philia*, or, among Latin writers, *amicitia*, in the absence of any explicit doctrinal difference on the matter between the two groups: for example, those who eschewed the vocabulary of friendship may have sought to privilege universal over particular love, to subsume personal relations in the love of God (adoration of the creator rather than of the creature), or to suppress private attachments in the context of monastic communities. I have argued elsewhere that a further element that made the vocabulary of friendship seem suspicious to some Christians was precisely its association with the idea of virtue, as exemplified in the letter of Gregory of Nazianzus cited above and throughout the classical tradition beginning with Aristotle. Friendship, as opposed to charity, is essentially a reciprocal and earned relationship, and to declare another person one's friend is to make a claim as much for one's own merit as for the qualities of the other. The classical ideal of friendship thus comes into conflict with Christian humility and the idea that love in this fallen world is a gift of grace rather than a tribute to a virtuous person's deserts. One might ascribe to apostles, saints, and martyrs a level of excellence worthy of our reverence and affection, but to arrogate such virtue to oneself was intuitively perceived as a subtle form of pride.<sup>2</sup>

To put the point slightly differently, to speak about a friend is inevitably to include oneself, however subtly, in the equation, for there is no such thing as a friend *simpliciter*, as one might imagine a person who is just or modest without necessary reference to another. A friend is always a friend to someone else. This feature of the phenomenology of friendship has a special bearing on the genres of biography and eulogy. It makes a difference whether the object of a biography or eulogy is represented as a person distantly worshipped and respected or as a personal friend whose life is then ineluctably intertwined with that of the author. For, on the one hand, by a profession of friendship the orator or writer runs the risk of invading the privileged space dedicated to the subject of praise, blurring the lines between the speaker and the world that is constructed by his text. Biography threatens to dissolve into autobiography—always a suspect genre—and eulogy into boasting. And, on the other hand, the self-proclaimed friend im-

1. Treu, "Φιλία und Ἀγάπη," 427; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 127; Neuhausen, "Zu Cassians Traktat De amicitia," 212–15; Van Dam, "Emperor, Bishops, and Friends," 70–72.

2. See Konstan, "Problems in the History of Christian Friendship"; id., *Friendship in the Classical World*, 156–66.

modestly asserts his own virtue in the mere suggestion that so worthy a fellow as the hero of his text entirely reciprocates his affection.

## TWO EULOGIES OF BASIL

An ideal occasion for observing the way in which a eulogist confronts and negotiates the topic of friendship in relation to his subject is provided by a fortunate coincidence in the survival of ancient documents. For not only is it possible to read the great funeral oration pronounced, probably in the year 382, by Gregory of Nazianzus upon the death of his dear friend Basil the Great of Caesarea, of which Raymond Van Dam has remarked that "the narrative portions . . . were as much about the nature of true friendship as about Basil," but there also survives the discourse commemorating Basil delivered by Basil's brother, St. Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>3</sup> The two eulogies provide a study in contrasts. But the differences are not due solely to the fact that the one was composed by a friend, the other by a blood relation. They lie as much, or indeed more, in the different evaluations that the two Gregories placed on their personal relations with the subject of their orations. Their speeches thus represent two distinct strategies of praise, differing critically in the extent to which they circumscribe the deceased and place him to a greater or lesser extent above and beyond the sphere of the eulogizer.

We can, indeed, control to some degree for the fact that Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa stand in different relations to Basil, and thus compensate somewhat for the ways in which this objective difference in their situation may have affected their approach to praising him. For there survives also a speech by Gregory of Nazianzus delivered upon the death of his own brother, Caesarius, which serves as a comparison with Gregory of Nyssa's discourse. In addition, Gregory of Nazianzus gave orations, still existing, on the deaths of his sister and his father. Of Gregory of Nyssa, in turn, there survive three other funeral discourses pronounced upon the deaths of a bishop, a princess, and an empress. In a different genre, and by way of con-

3. Van Dam, "Emperor, Bishops, and Friends," 72. Doubts raised against the authenticity of the latter discourse as a work of Gregory of Nyssa are unconvincing; see Delehay, *Passions des martyrs* (repr. 1966), 136–37. The suggestion of Bernardi, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze*, 273–74, that Nazianzus' discourse as we have it is a literary encomium not intended for oral delivery does not materially affect the present argument.

trast, there is Gregory of Nyssa's biography of his sister St. Macrina, in which she is presented as a model of Christian virtue. With these materials in hand, we can derive a clearer sense of how the two Gregories construed the task of praising a dear person, whether kin or not, upon his or her death. Finally, there is one last document that bears upon our investigation. I have suggested that in inserting himself into the frame of his biographical narrative, the eulogist risks converting his discourse into autobiography. It is thus of particular value and interest that we possess Gregory of Nazianzus's autobiographical poem, composed at more or less the same time as his speech on Basil, and also recording aspects of their famous friendship. It is no surprise, I think, that nothing of the sort survives from the hand of the other Gregory, or of Basil himself.

Gregory of Nyssa spoke first, by a matter of a year or perhaps two. Gregory of Nazianzus was conscious of his belatedness in the contest, as he terms it (*agōn*), and offers his apologies:

If I have entered the lists so far behind the right moment and after so many eulogizers who have spoken reverently of his deeds both privately and publicly, let no one be astonished. . . . Just as when he was with us he used always to correct many of the things we did both by the measure [*horos*] of friendship [*philia*] and by a greater standard [*nomos*]<sup>4</sup>—I am not ashamed to say it, because he was a standard of virtue [*aretē*] for all—so now too that he is above us he will be forgiving toward our deeds. (*Or.* 43.2)

Gregory begs the indulgence of those who may have spoken more warmly (*thermoteroi*) than he, if indeed all are not equal (*homotimoi*) in regard to praise of Basil, and he insists: "It is not through disdain that I disregarded propriety—I would never be so neglectful either of virtue or of the duty of friendship [*to philikon kathēkon*]<sup>5</sup>—nor because I believed praise of him pertained more to others than to myself." Gregory pleads in excuse timidity, religious responsibilities, and ill health, and prays that he will neither slight Basil in his encomium nor come in far behind the rest, "although we all fall equally short of him" (*Or.* 43.2).

Gregory of Nazianzus's proem is masterful. He is conscious of being in competition with earlier eulogists, above all, perhaps, with Gregory of Nyssa, and, in an elegantly balanced paragraph, he appeals to the equality of all in comparison to the superlative excellence

of Basil himself. But the very superiority of Basil involves his virtue as a friend, which makes allowance for the other's weaknesses; Gregory, in turn, can and must speak of his own virtue and commitment to their friendship, for how else can he have deserved Basil's affection?

What was it in Gregory of Nyssa's encomium of his brother that stimulated the other Gregory's sense of rivalry, or at least his fear of doing less than justice to his subject? The formula behind Gregory of Nyssa's eulogy is simple and insistent: Basil was a perfect man of God and in no way inferior to the greatest prophets and apostles of the Old and New Testaments in his devotion or his achievements. Basil was "good before God from his birth, hoary in his habits from his youth" (PG 46.789B). Time alone rendered him second to the apostles: "For if Basil had partaken of human life at the same time as Paul, he would surely have been written up by Paul just as Silvanus [= Silas, Acts 15.22, etc.] and Timotheus [Acts 16.1, etc.] were" (789D). Gregory of Nyssa continues with a point-for-point comparison between Basil and Paul himself that is worth quoting at some length:

But let faith be tested against faith, and argument against argument; for he who justly tests the miracles in parallel will find that there was upon both of them a single grace from the Spirit itself implanted in each in proportion to their faith, and if Paul came first in time, and Basil was revealed many generations later, it bespeaks the working of the divine dispensation concerning human beings and not evidence of any inferiority in virtue, since Moses too was many ages later than Abraham (792A).

And so Gregory concludes:

If, then, in the case of the other holy men, chronological order in no way diminished them in their progress according to God, but Grace worked equally [*homotimōs*] in each of them in regard to perfection, we reasonably make bold to say that in our generation too that man of God, that great vessel of truth, Basil, is to be numbered among those famous holy men (793D--796A).

Gregory equates Basil's struggle against Arianism with that of Elias against Ahab (796C-D), and where churches were too distant for him to mingle with their congregations in person, he guided them by letters, just like Paul (797A). Like the greatest of biblical figures, Basil was fearless, even at the prospect of the excision of his liver: he smil-

ingly says to his would-be tormentor (797B), "I am grateful to you for your decision, for my liver was weighing rather painfully on my inwards; if you remove it, as you have threatened, you will liberate my body from what is hurting it" (a macabre kind of deliverance this). Basil loved God every bit as much as Paul did, for both "were dedicated to God with all their heart" (800B). And if Basil was not inferior in *agapē*, which is the greatest thing of all, then he fell short in no other good (800D).

One might object that Basil did not, like Paul, see the third heaven and paradise and hear the secret words, but Gregory is up to this challenge too: Paul was out of his body at this moment (2 Cor. 12.2), so it apparently does not count. If John stood up to Herod, Basil did no less toward Valens (801B). Finally, Gregory comes to Moses "the Great"—one catches an allusion to the epithet that was attached to Basil during his own lifetime—who is the model for all who look to virtue, "nor would it be in any way invidious to show that our teacher [i.e., Basil] in his life imitated the lawgiver in everything he could" (808D).

Gregory concludes his oration by observing before the brethren (*adelphoi* [817A]) that "country and family [*genos*] and all that kind of thing, which are bestowed upon those who have them by arbitrary luck, may be passed over in silence" (816A). "What then was Basil's lineage, and what his country? His family was his affinity [*oikeiōsis*] to God, and his country, virtue" (816A-B), and on this basis one may properly laud him; "but as for land and blood and flesh and wealth and royal offices and the showiness of these things, let those who wish bear witness to them before the friends of the world"; the allusion to James 4.4 is resonant: "The friendship of this world is the enmity of God: therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world is rendered an enemy of God."

In placing him among the holiest figures of the Bible, Gregory has elevated his brother above all mortal attachments. He is of no country, belongs to no earthly family (place of origin and lineage were standard introductory *topoi* of the encomium; see below). His discourse constructs a barrier between Basil, who is written into a sacred text that is not so much ancient as transcendently enduring, and those outside the narrative space, whether the speaker himself or his audience, who take Basil as their ideal. There is no communion between these realms: in saying nothing of Basil's family, Gregory is, of course, saying nothing of his own. There are no personal reflections, no an-



ecdotes of their youth together (Basil was prematurely hoary then), no indication of an individual bond. Basil inhabits a different universe, in which the friendship of this world counts as enmity with God. No wonder that Gregory's only mention of *philoï* is contemptuous.

It is against the precedent of this laudation that Gregory of Nazianzus comes to deliver his tribute to his friend as friend. This Gregory has no compunctions about tracing Basil's worldly ancestry, and he gives special attention to Basil's parents, whose union "was not lesser in respect to their equality [*to homotimon*] in virtue than in respect to their bodies" (43.9), which latter were responsible for what Gregory takes to be the greatest of their qualities, *euteknia* or fecundity (cf. Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1.5.6). "Who," he asks, "does not know Basil, the father of this one, a great name among all, who achieved his paternal wish if any human being ever did, not to say uniquely? For he excelled everyone in *aretē*, and was prevented by his son alone from winning first prize" (43.10).

#### THE PAGAN RHETORICAL TRADITION

In praising the forefathers of the deceased, Gregory was following a standard formula for funerary discourses. In the Roman *laudationes funebres*, praise of the ancestors represented a crucial part, indeed fully the half, of the eulogy. Traditionally, members of the family were on hand wearing the funerary masks, or *imagines*, of distinguished forebears.<sup>4</sup> There is some doubt about the extent to which the Greek orations composed for particular individuals were indebted to the Roman practice, which was quite ancient. The Greek, and more particularly Athenian, custom of pronouncing *epitaphioi* for the war dead collectively had by Roman times lapsed into a purely literary and archaizing genre, but the development of the individual, or *idios*, funerary discourse during the Second Sophistic may nevertheless have drawn chiefly on indigenous Greek models.<sup>5</sup> However that may be,

4. See Polybius 6.54.1; Quintilian *Inst. Or.* 3.7.10–11; O. C. Crawford, "Laudatio Funebris," 23–24; for the funeral procedure, see Price, "From Noble Funerals to Divine Cult," 62–70.

5. See Pernot, *Rhétorique de l'éloge*, 79. Greek encomiastic theory may have influenced the later development of Roman laudations; see Pernot, *Rhétorique de l'éloge*, 107, Quintilian *Inst. Or.* 3.7.

in his handbook of epideictic genres, Menander Rhetor (third century A.D.) advises the composer of an individual funerary eulogy to "give praise on the basis of all the encomiastic topoi: family, birth, nature, rearing, education, character."<sup>6</sup> And his rules do no more than summarize the practice evident in the funeral discourses written by Dio of Prusa (*Or.* 29 on the death of the athlete Melancomas, esp. 29.2, 8–10, 14) and Aelius Aristides (*Or.* 31.3–10).<sup>7</sup>

As a consequence of his rhetorical training in Athens, Gregory of Nazianzus was deeply familiar with pagan literature, and he had no hesitation about affirming the value of learning. In the oration for Basil, he asserts: "I believe that all who have any sense are agreed that education [*paideusis*] is first among the goods we possess" (*Or.* 43.11), and among the Cappadocian fathers Gregory of Nazianzus was the one most hospitable to non-Christian learning and philosophy.<sup>8</sup> It is thus perfectly natural that he should have composed his discourse on Basil according to the prevailing precepts. And yet it is impossible not to note how, in his lengthy excursus on Basil's parents, Gregory of Nazianzus flies in the face of the other Gregory's explicit rejection of this tradition.

According to Menander Rhetor's recommendations concerning the education of the deceased, one should "say that he gave proof [of his native disposition] and therefore surpassed others of his age" (420). Gregory expatiates on this theme too, for no memory was dearer to him than that of his student days, which lasted until he was over thirty, in the brilliant and stimulating environment of Athens. It was there, moreover, that his friendship with Basil flourished. Thus, in recounting this formative period in Basil's life, as the handbooks ordained,

6. Menander 420, ed. Russell and Wilson, *Menander Rhetor*; cf. Theon of Alexandria (prob. 1st century A.D.), ch. 10, "Progymnasmata of Theon," ed. and trans. Butts; Kierdorf, *Laudatio funebris*, 49–93; Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*, 229; Pernot, *Rhétorique de l'éloge*, 134–78. Theon treats encomia for living persons rather than eulogies for the dead, but he notes in the opening paragraph that these forms of praise, as well as hymns in praise of gods and heroes, have "one and the same plan [*epiphodos*] of argument."

7. See *Or.* 32, an epistle on the death of his teacher Alexander, with P. Aelius Aristides, ed. and trans. Behr, 393–94; also Libanius *Or.* 18.7–30. Dio's eulogy for Melancomas was probably written for delivery by an official at the games, not by Dio himself. Libanius's *epitaphios* is in fact an apologetic pamphlet for the career of Julian, presented (18.1–30) in the form of a funeral discourse.

8. See Puech, *Littérature grecque chrétienne*, 3: 338–39; Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 17–20.

Gregory at the same time enters the narrative in his own right: "That was the prelude of our friendship, thence the spark of our union [*sunapheia*], thus were we wounded by one another" (the allusion is to love's arrows). Gregory next tells how some acquaintances (*sunētheis*) and friends of Basil's confronted him with sophistical questions out of envy rather than the good will appropriate to friendship. At first, out of ignorance of their motives and a certain vanity, Gregory took their side, thus evening up the fight. But when he saw through the situation, he abruptly veered round and secured the victory for Basil's camp. Gregory resorts to Homeric diction to describe how Basil, rejoicing in the event, hurled his syllogisms and routed the enemy. "Thus was ignited the second—not spark, now, but bonfire of ours, brilliant and sky-high" (43.17).

Gregory records that around himself and Basil there formed a noble phratry, and thenceforward, "it befell us to be conspicuous to our teachers and colleagues, conspicuous to all of Greece and its best-known people." In comparison to so famous a team (*xunōris*), all the Orestes and Pylades and Homeric Molionides seemed as nothing. "But," says Gregory "I have been drawn unawares into my own praises, I, who have never accepted this from anyone else. But it is no wonder if here too I have taken some advantage of that man's friendship in regard to my reputation [*euphēmia*] now that he is dead, as I did in regard to my virtue when he was alive" (43.22). And with this, Gregory returns to his theme and itemizes Basil's many intellectual talents.

It is easy to imagine a slightly pompous Gregory of Nazianzus being carried away with his own importance in the course of eulogizing his distinguished friend, but there is nothing careless or casual about this oration. Gregory of Nazianzus chose precisely the opposite strategy to that adopted by Basil's brother, Gregory of Nyssa. Where the brother circumscribed Basil within the numinous world of the prophets and apostles, leaving no opening across which a sense of personal intimacy might arc or seem appropriate, Gregory of Nazianzus deliberately creates within his discourse a permeable or accessible domain in which his personal relationship to Basil has its place. Basil is on this side of the divide as much as on the other, and necessarily so: for friendship exists only where there is some possibility of equality, and to have treated Basil entirely in the manner of

Gregory of Nyssa would have meant eliminating that aspect of Basil's life that was, for Gregory of Nazianzus, among the most important—the friendship between them.

In fact, in the final sections of his eulogy (70–76), after he has counted off such virtues of Basil's as poverty, self-control, contentment with little, chastity, celibacy, and generosity (60–63), and listed Basil's oral and written contributions to the faith, in which he does not neglect to mention his own role as Basil's mouthpiece (69), Gregory of Nazianzus adopts precisely the method of Gregory of Nyssa and launches into a comparison of Basil with the entire pantheon of biblical heroes, from Adam, Enos, Enoch, and Noah on down to John and Paul. The collection is so ample that it has almost the quality of parody, and perhaps Gregory felt moved to outdo the earlier effort of his namesake. In my judgment, the force of these parallels in Gregory of Nazianzus's speech is different from that in Gregory of Nyssa's: rather than enrolling Basil in the remote universe of saintly men, they serve as mythological exempla, like the earlier reference to Orestes and Pylades, confirming the exceptional excellence of Basil in this world. This type of comparison, or *synkrisis*, was standard practice in pagan funerary discourses too, although without the distancing effect that often accompanies biblical allusions.<sup>9</sup> But perhaps my intuition is wrong, and as he neared the moment of Basil's death, Gregory of Nazianzus thought it suitable to elevate the object of his discourse onto another plane.

#### THE EULOGIES IN CONTEXT

It might be supposed that part of Gregory of Nyssa's motive for taking so detached a view of Basil's saintliness was precisely their connection as brothers. To celebrate Basil's parents was at the same time to vaunt his own, and if he was the intimate of the great man's, it was owing to nothing more than an accident of birth, not the free decision that unites two friends. Here, the evidence of Gregory of Nazianzus's funeral oration on the death of his own brother Caesarius becomes of interest (*Or.* 7, *PG* 35:755–88).

9. See Dio of Prusa 29.19–20; Aelius Aristides 31.15, ed. and trans. Behr; Libanius *Or.* 17.32; Theon of Alexandria, "Progymnasmata of Theon," ed. and trans. Butts, ch. 10.

In the introduction to his translation of Gregory of Nazianzus's eulogy of Basil (29), Jean Bernardi remarks of Caesarius that "his life, without having been scandalous, could only with difficulty be offered as exemplary," and he confesses to entertaining the impression that "the man of letters and words that this bishop remained all his life eagerly seized the first opportunity that presented itself to display his talents as an orator." This is perhaps unfair, but more to the point is that Gregory exploits much the same general pattern for this discourse, which is addressed to "friends, brothers, and parents" (756A), that he had employed in praising Basil. Thus he experiences no awkwardness in glorifying his own parents on this occasion, even though the speech is pronounced in their presence: "Caesarius's parents—to begin with the point that is most appropriate for us—whom you all know, and whose virtue you see and hear and esteem and admire . . ." (757B). One may compare Gregory's funeral oration for his sister Gorgonia (*Or.* 8, PG 35.789–818), where he asks (793A): "Who does not know the Abraham and Sara among us, I mean Gregory and Nonna his wife—for it is a fine thing not to skip over the names, which are a summons to virtue." Gregory duly turns next to the topic of education—not Caesarius's only, but his own as well, while they were still at home. Then they part to continue their studies, Gregory in Palestine, Caesarius in Alexandria (761A). But when Caesarius returns home, loaded down with learning like a freighter, says Gregory, there occurred a miraculous event worth the telling. For their mother had prayed that, "just as she had sent the two of them off, so she should see them come back together with one another. For we seemed to be a kind of team [*xunōris*], if not to others, to our mother at all events" (764B); one notes the same term here that Gregory had applied to his bond with Basil. God listened to the wish of this pious woman, and so it happened, without any prior arrangement between the boys. Not a wonder on the scale of the prophets and apostles, perhaps, but a sweet opportunity to express the brothers' natural solidarity.

Caesarius led a worldly life as a doctor, but Gregory narrates how he yielded to his brother's wishes above everything else and abandoned his flourishing life in Byzantium in order to return home to his country and family (765A). After describing Caesarius's further career, Gregory sums up: "Such was our life, my brother, such the transience of the living, such the game upon this earth" (777C). The sec-

ond part of the oration, addressed to the parents who have survived the son, takes the form of a consolation (*parathumia*, 781B), and abandons the genre of the eulogy.<sup>10</sup>

It is true that Caesarius was not a saint, but it is equally clear that he was dear to Gregory, and such personal bonds appeared to him worthy of celebration and of essential importance in human life, however fleeting they are in the larger scheme of things. In choosing this style of encomium, Gregory is expressing not only his debt to the rhetorical tradition, but also the value that he places on human ties, whether with his brother or, on a more profound level, with Basil the Great, whom he praises, in an oration addressed to Gregory of Nyssa (*Or.* 11, PG 35.831–42), in the exalted language of Ecclesiasticus (6.15): "Of all the things that are, there is no equivalent to a trustworthy friend, nor any measure of his nobility; a trustworthy friend is a powerful shelter," and, Gregory adds in his own right, a fortified palace, *ōkhurōmenon basileion*, obviously punning on the name of Basil himself.

Just as Gregory of Nazianzus, in praising his brother, resorts to a similar style of discourse to that deployed in his eulogy for Basil, so too Gregory of Nyssa adopts a more or less consistent manner of exposition in his four surviving funeral orations. We may consider for purposes of comparison the speech he delivered at the death of Meletius, bishop of Antioch.<sup>11</sup> Gregory begins: "A new apostle, who has been enrolled among the apostles, has augmented the number of our apostles. For the holy ones have drawn to themselves a man of similar character, the wearers of the wreath another athlete who wears the wreath" (852A). Meletius, like Basil, is at once assimilated to the august company of Christ's immediate circle and removed from the domain of ordinary life. The introduction does not suggest that Gregory will narrate the personal affection, if any, that he felt for the bishop of Antioch, or that he will recount intimate anecdotes of their relationship, and in fact no such details are recounted. Meletius is represented as belonging almost to another order of being, and con-

10. So, too, Ambrose departs from the traditional Roman pattern of *laudationes* by incorporating consolatory *topoi* in his funeral encomia, to which he himself refers as *consolationes*; see Kierdorf, *Laudatio funebris*, 82–93, 128, and cf. Ambrose *Val.* 40ff., *De exc. fr.* 1.14, *Expl. psalm. duodecim* 1.51.1; also Aelius Aristides *Or.* 31.14–18, ed. and trans. Behr.

11. PG 46: 851–64; also edited by Andreas Spira in *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, ed. Heil et al., 9.1.441–57.

tacts with the ordinary world are governed by protocols of reserve and respect. It is as though Gregory were praising a long-dead and hallowed martyr rather than a personal acquaintance.<sup>12</sup>

In the body of the discourse, Gregory assumes an incantatory style, consisting of short sentences in staccato rhythms, that maintains the distance between the deceased and the public:

I am impelled to cry aloud the misfortune as though on a stage. I pity you, O Church; to you I speak, city of Antioch. I pity you for this sudden transformation. How was this nobility deformed? How was this perfect form pillaged? How did this flower suddenly perish? Truly the garden has withered and the flower has fallen. (856B–C)

Or again:

When that chaste Church first saw this man, it saw a face truly formed in the image of God, it saw love stream forth, it saw grace poured about his lips, the highest limit of humility beyond which it is not possible to imagine more, gentleness like that of David, wisdom like that of Solomon, goodness like that of Moses, strictness like that of Samuel (857B–C),

and so forth on down through Joseph, Daniel, Elias, John, and Paul. In an exalted sequence such as this, a personal note would sound discordant.<sup>13</sup>

In celebrating his friendship with Basil in his *epitaphios logos*, Greg-

12. On eulogies pronounced at the tombs of martyrs as a new genre, see Delehay, *Passions des martyrs*, 133–35; Delehay wisely recommends (p. 136) that “whoever wishes to enter into the spirit of their eloquence must not isolate those speeches in the works of these orators that have martyrs as their object from those, also numerous, that pertain to the same epideictic genre but have as their specific topic the eulogy of a person remarkable for his piety, whether their reputation for sanctity brings them close to the martyrs themselves or they are regarded as still belonging to a lower level.” For discussion of the martyr eulogies, see *ibid.*, 139–69.

13. To some extent, the antithetical style of the Second Sophistic is analogous to Gregory’s incantatory manner; see Aelius Aristides’ lament for his young student (31.11): “The choruses of your age-mates long for you, the elders long for you, your city that expected the greatest things of you longs for you”; cf. Libanius’s “Lament” (*monôidia*) for Julian, *Or.* 17.2: “The rewards of the good have perished, the companies of the wicked and licentious are raised high”; also 17.27; Pernot, *Rhétorique de l’éloge*, 381–94. Aelius Aristides also compares his discourse to complaints on the stage (31.14, ed. and trans. Behr): “But as though in some tragedy I imagine that, in the very midst of my lamentations, I hear the voice of some god from the machine who changes my threnody into praise.” For the image of the flower, see Libanius *Or.* 17.12: “this meadow that had bloomed has suddenly wilted.”

ory of Nazianzus blurs the boundary between the sacred space of the eulogized holy man, which is constituted by the text itself, and ordinary life, in which the speaker and his audience communicate about the deceased at the moment of the funerary discourse. I do not mean to suggest that the discursive domain of a eulogy is in principle separate from the world of the living. Roman *laudationes*, for example, do not appear to have observed such a protocol; it is not unlikely that Laelius, in his oration for Scipio, touched on the topic of their friendship, which may in part have inspired Cicero’s treatment of their relationship in *De amicitia*.<sup>14</sup> More relevantly, both Dio of Prusa (29.1) and Aelius Aristides (32.1–2) mention in the proems to their funeral orations their personal relation to the deceased. Whether or not a text serves to isolate or delimit its content is a function of generic conventions and traditions that are constantly generated in practice and always open to variation. To include one’s own portrait in an epic or mythological painting or relief, as Phidias is alleged to have done on the shield of Athena in the Parthenon, may violate an accepted code in one context and not in another.

Thus, even Gregory of Nyssa, in his biography of his sister Macrina, which takes the form of an extended epistle, offers details of her personal life and family history (cf. 371.12–13: “For the maiden who is being memorialized is no stranger to our family”), as well as moving scenes of their own deep affection for one another (e.g., 389.3–5).<sup>15</sup> These elements are indispensable, because Gregory’s purpose in this essay is to present Macrina as an example, useful to others, of a woman who has attained the highest degree of human virtue, and her care and nurture of her brothers is important evidence of her goodness (contrast the more hagiographical notice of her in *Ep.* 19).<sup>16</sup> A paradigm of righteousness must be portrayed as acting effectively in this world. In this respect, Gregory’s eulogy of his sister is analogous in intention to his biography of Moses, who is again represented

14. See Tondoi, *Scritti di filologia*, 108.

15. Ed. Woods Callahan in *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, ed. Jaeger et al., 8.1.370–414; on the form, see 370.1–6.

16. E.g., 64.19–23, ed. Pasquali in *Gregorii Nysseni opera* 8.2. The idea that biography provides models of virtuous behavior is characteristic of one strand in the ancient tradition, represented for example by Cornelius Nepos, e.g., *Vitae* 15.1.1 (Epaminondas), 16.1.1 (Pelopidas); cf. Livy *Prol.* 10; Pomeroy, “Polybius’ Death Notices,” 408–9 (on Polybius).

as the pattern of a perfect life (*teleios bios*, 2.21). The literary strategy of addressing both works to an unnamed reader (*Life of Moses* 1.16, cf. 2.7, 19; *Life of Macrina* 370.1–6; in each case the manuscripts offer conflicting guesses as to the identity of the dedicatee) is consistent with Gregory's heuristic or didactic objective.<sup>17</sup> In this genre, then, Gregory of Nyssa felt at liberty to incorporate references to himself in describing the magnanimity of his deceased sister, who had acted as surrogate mother to her younger brothers.

Nevertheless, self-representation tends to carry, as we remarked at the beginning, a certain suggestion of presumption, which perhaps explains the suspicion that often attaches to autobiography. To describe one's own life smacks of self-glorification. In the context of the puritanical collectivism of late 1920s communism, for instance, Leon Trotsky felt obliged to defend himself against imputations of arrogance and individualism for the publication of his memoir, *My Life*; hence his prefatory observation: "Nobody has as yet succeeded in writing an autobiography without writing about himself."<sup>18</sup>

It may thus be relevant to our theme that Gregory of Nazianzus composed an autobiographical poem, *De vita sua*, more or less contemporaneously with his eulogy of Basil, in which he describes their friendship in broadly similar terms. Here too, as in the funeral discourse for his brother Caesarius, Gregory lauds his own parents: "My father was an extremely worthy person [*kalos te kagathos sphodra*], old, forthright in manner, a standard of how to live, a true patriarch, a second Abraham" (51–53). Next, in due order, comes his education: "Then Athens and rhetoric [*logoi*]; but let others tell what happened there, how we conducted ourselves from the first in fear of God . . . we were not drawn by those who tended to harm, but we ourselves drew our friends toward better things" (211–13, 219–20)—the *praeteritio*, a common device in Christian panegyric,<sup>19</sup> here introduces an unexpected note of modesty. God, says Gregory, attached him then to Basil: "We were a team [*xunōris*] not inconspicuous in Greece, with all things in common, and one soul binding the distance between two bodies. . . . We reached such a point of confidence that we voiced the depths of our hearts" (228–30, 233–34); the allusions to the classical

tropes of friendship (possessions in common, one soul in two bodies) are obvious.<sup>20</sup>

Recollecting the parting between the two friends when their education was done still brings tears, Gregory says, to his eyes (247–48); indeed, in describing the scene Gregory resorts to the same language he had employed in speaking of the death of his sister (244; cf. *Or.* 8.813C–816A). Gregory also permits himself to express in the autobiography (406–13), as also, albeit more gently, in the eulogy (43.59), his resentment, still fresh, at the pressure Basil placed upon him to assume the bishopric.

In this poem, as in his funeral speech for Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus locates himself within the space of literature and reflects upon the relationship that was for him the most powerful worldly bond in his life. There was, in turn, no other way for Gregory to narrate the life of Basil: to exclude himself from an account of Basil, or Basil from his own autobiography, would be to dissolve the team, the *xunōris*, that they constituted by virtue of their friendship. If friendship was a central fact of his and Basil's experience, as Gregory believed, it demanded that there be a place for Gregory in Basil's eulogy.

At one point in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (8.8.1159a5–12), Aristotle takes up the odd puzzle of whether a person will wish in behalf of a friend that he become a god. The paradox resides in the fact that a true friend wishes all good things for his friend, but the distance between a god and a mortal is so great as to negate the possibility of friendship, which, as Aristotle conceives it, depends on some degree of similarity or equality between the partners. Thus, to wish that one's friend become a god is to wish an end to the friendship. In a sense, a version of this conundrum confronted Gregory in the composition of his encomium of Basil. If Gregory had followed the formula adopted by Gregory of Nyssa and also by Ambrose in his funeral speeches for his brother Satyrus and the young emperor Valentinian II,<sup>21</sup> and eliminated all mention of family, education, offices, honors, and pretty much everything that Basil did, he would indeed have suppressed worldly considerations. So too Jerome recommended that it be left to others to mention the achievements of parents and their ancient lin-

17. On the function of the addressee in didactic literature (especially poetry), see Clay, Mitsis and Schiesaro, eds., *Mega nepios*; Toohey, *Epic Lessons*, 15–18.

18. Trotsky, *My Life*, xiv.

19. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric*, 231.

20. See Gregor von Nazianz: *De vita sua*, ed. Jungck, ad loc.; a full English translation of the poem may be found in White, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Autobiographical Poems*.

21. See Kierdorf, *Laudatio funebris*, 127.

eages, but "we shall praise nothing except what is proper and proceeds from the purest fount of a holy mind."<sup>22</sup> At the same time, however, he would have placed the dead man beyond the reach of a reciprocal bond such as friendship, thus canceling the very attachment he wished to commemorate.

To judge from the Christian funeral orations that survive, Gregory of Nazianzus drew more than his contemporaries did on the pagan paradigm according to which one praised country, family, parents, and secular achievements as well as more spiritual virtues. He was, as George Kennedy remarks, "the most important figure in the synthesis of classical rhetoric and Christianity,"<sup>23</sup> and we have seen that he was unabashed in his esteem for traditional learning.<sup>24</sup> But the form that Gregory elected for his eulogies is not simply a function of his commitment to pagan wisdom, any more than his vision of friendship and use of the vocabulary of *philos* and *philia* are reducible to a classicizing habit of thought or reflex. Rather, Gregory believed in the classical ideal of friendship as a reciprocal loving relationship between equal and virtuous people in this world, and in solemnizing this bond in his funeral orations, he reached for the form that was most hospitable to exhibiting it. At the same time, he adapted the pagan tradition to the celebration of Christian values, as evidenced in his extended comparison of Basil with biblical figures after the example of Gregory of Nyssa's oration.

There is no reason to suppose that Gregory of Nazianzus differed with Gregory of Nyssa over fundamental questions of faith. As Jaroslav Pelikan writes: "Careful study . . . has repeatedly confirmed the impression of 'a striking similarity among the Cappadocians' in thought and even in language."<sup>25</sup> It is fair to say that the decision among Christian writers whether to adopt the language of friend-

22. Jerome *Ep.* 108.3; see Kierdorf, *Laudatio funebris*, 67; cf. the same contrast between the pagan and Christian *enkōmiōn nomoi* in Basil's oration for St. Gordius (*PG* 31: 492B–C); also Basil's "Homily on the Forty Martyrs" (*PG* 31: 509A–B); Gregory of Nyssa on the Forty Martyrs (*PG* 46: 753B). Gregory of Nazianzus himself recognized the distinction in his martyrological eulogies, as in his discourse on the Maccabees (*PG* 35: 913); see Delehay, *Passions des martyrs*, 139–41. On Ambrose, see Biermann, *Die Leichenreden des Ambrosius von Mailand*.

23. *Greek Rhetoric*, 215.

24. On Gregory as an innovator within the tradition of Christianizing funerary eulogies, see Puech, *Littérature grecque chrétienne*, 348–49.

25. Pelikan, *Christianity*, 6, quoting Norris, ed., *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 185.

ship or reject it radically in favor of that of brotherhood and *agapē* or *caritas* was less a matter of doctrine than of sensibility.<sup>26</sup> But neither was an attachment to the terminology of *philia* simply a difference without a distinction. If a passionate commitment to particular human friendships was not strictly inconsistent with Christian teachings, it was nevertheless problematic within the spiritual world of the fourth-century Church.<sup>27</sup> In this respect, Gregory of Nazianzus was taking a stand in his praise of his special relation with Basil, all the more so by enshrining it in a discourse dedicated to the saint when he was deceased and thus removed from mortal ties. Gregory's attitude toward friendship, like his style in rhetoric, had roots in his admiration for classical learning. But both postures also represented a well-defined, if not necessarily entirely self-conscious, orientation to human relations within the ecclesiastical culture of his time. His eulogy of Basil, besides being the greatest achievement of classical oratory in his century, is also the vehicle of Gregory's special vision of human friendship.

26. See Van Dam, "Emperor, Bishops, and Friends," 72–73.

27. On suspicion of particular friendship, cf. Basil's hostility to "partial affection and comradeship" (*merikē philia kai hetairia*), *Logos askētikos* = *PG* 31: 885; in general, see chs. 79–81; also *Ep.* 56, 204; Augustine *Ep.* 258, on which see White, *Christian Friendship*, 58.

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## 8

## Eros Transformed: Same-Sex Love and Divine Desire

*Reflections on the Erotic Vocabulary in St. Gregory of  
Nazianzus's Speech on St. Basil the Great*

JOSTEIN BØRTNES

After only a short time in Athens, my longing desire turns me into  
Homer's horse, and breaking the bonds of those who restrained me,  
I thunder over the plains, running towards my mate.

ἀλλ' ἐπιμείναντά με ταῖς Ἀθήναις χρόνον οὐχὶ συχνὸν ποιεῖ τὸν  
Ὅμηρικὸν ἵππον ὁ πόθος, καὶ τὰ δεσμὰ ῥήξας τῶν κατεχόντων  
κροαίνω κατὰ πεδίων καὶ πρὸς τὸν σύννομον ἐφερόμην.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 43.24.28–31

This is how Gregory of Nazianzus in his *Funeral Speech for Basil the Great* concludes his long digression about their life at Athens together and the beginning of their *philia*. Describing how he returned to Cappadocia to be reunited with his friend, he uses an image we know from the *Iliad*, when toward the end of the sixth book, Paris runs toward his brother Hector: "As when some stalled horse who has been cornfed at the manger / breaking free of his rope gallops over the plain in thunder" (*Il.* 6.506–7, trans. Richmond Lattimore).

In the above passage we find already some of the elements typical of what I should like to call Gregory's *rhetoric of friendship*: his syncretic references to classical Greek literature—Homer in this instance—his frequent use of the prefix *sun-*, and the concept of *pothos*—"yearn-

Epigraph: I have throughout used the text in Jean Bernardi, ed., *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours* 42–43, 116–306. References to this edition are given in brackets after quotations. The translations are my own.

ing", or "longing desire." The repetition of these elements is a key device in Gregory's rhetorical effort to bring out the true meaning of his and Basil's *philia* as the central event in his own life.

The friendship story begins when Basil arrives at Athens, "the base of eloquence" (τὸ τῶν λόγων ἔδαφος) (43.14.6)—"to me if to anyone a city truly of gold and patroness of goodness" (τὰς χρυσᾶς ὄντως ἐμοὶ καὶ τῶν καλῶν προξένους) (43.14.7–8). The friendship story takes the form of a long digression from the central ὑπόθεσις of the speech. "Athens", says Gregory, "brought me to know more perfectly a man who had not been unknown to me before. In my quest for eloquence I found happiness" (λόγους ἐπιζητῶν εὐδαιμονίαν ἐκομισάμην)—and with a new proem he goes over to the story of their *philia*:

Up to this point our discourse has proceeded smoothly, carrying us along the even, very easy, truly royal highway in the praises of this man. But from here onwards, I do not know what language to employ or which way to turn, for our discourse is getting difficult. For at this point of my speech I should like to take the opportunity and follow my desire to add to what I have said a few things that concern myself personally, and to delay my story a little in order to tell you about the cause, the circumstances, and the origin of this friendship, or, to put it more properly, this unity of body and soul [τὸ τῆς φιλίας, εἴτ' οὖν συμποσίας καὶ συμφυίας, εἰ χρὴ προσειπεῖν οἰκειότερον]. For the eye is not wont to turn away easily from attractive sights, and if torn away by force, it is wont to return to them again. It is the same with a speech when it tells of that which is most sweet to us. Yet I fear the difficulty of the undertaking. I will try, therefore, to use all possible moderation. And if I should be overpowered by longing desire [ὑπὸ τοῦ πόθου] pardon this most just of all feelings, not to experience which would be a terrible loss, at least to sensible men. (43. 14: 8–29)

*Philia, sumptnoia, sumfuia, pothos*—these are all basic words in Gregory's erotic vocabulary.

In the study of Gregory's funeral speech, there is a tendency to focus *either* on the chain of events that together constitute the story of Basil's life (and of Gregory's insofar as the lives of the two friends coincide), *or* on rhetorical devices. Rosemary Radford Ruether, for example, in her discussion of the friendship passages, makes the astute remark that Gregory "describes their love for each other in a discourse of friendship that is reminiscent of Plato's *Symposium*; each



clung to the other because of the vision of beauty he perceived in the other's soul."<sup>1</sup> But instead of expanding on her observation, she proceeds to give a quick résumé of the various *synkriseis* employed by Gregory in order to describe "the marvels of their love and educational prowess."<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, Carolinne White, in her learned book about fourth-century Christian friendships, confines herself to a summary of the main events in the story of Basil's and Gregory's *philia* paying minimal attention to the rhetorical means employed in order to describe it. Her paraphrase of how their friendship began is characteristic of how she retells their story:

Their affection for each other was apparently roused by two incidents which occurred shortly after Basil's arrival in Athens, in which Gregory detects God's providential work. In the first instance Gregory, with some experience of student life and impressed by the newcomer, persuaded a group of students to refrain from submitting the unsuspecting Basil to the traditional initiation trick. And secondly, Gregory supported Basil in an argument with a group of contentious Armenians, jealous of his reputation, for which Basil was again grateful to Gregory: it was this gratitude which helped to fire their friendship.<sup>3</sup>

By reducing Gregory's narrative to a précis, White manages to strip it of its erotic vocabulary, and "helped to fire their friendship" seems a poor substitute, if not an outright bowdlerization, of Gregory's original imagery. For if we go back to Gregory's discourse, we shall see that his rhetoric of friendship plays a much more active role in his rendering of the two incidents than in White's paraphrase: "This was," Gregory says after the first episode, "the prelude to our friendship, this kindled the spark of our relationship, thus we were wounded by our love for one another" (Τοῦτο ἡμῖν τῆς φιλίας προοίμιον, ἐντεῦθεν ὁ τῆς συναφείας σπινθήρ, οὕτως ἐπ' ἀλλήλοις ἐτρώμεν) (43.17.1–2). And when Basil with Gregory's support wins the dispute with the Armenians, Gregory comments that now their friendship was kindled for the second time, "no longer a spark, but a manifest and conspicuous blaze" (Οὗτος δεύτερος ἡμῖν τῆς φιλίας οὐκέτι σπινθήρ, ἀλλ' ἤδη

1. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 121.

2. Ibid.

3. White, *Christian Friendship*, 62.

πυρρὸς ἀνάπτεται περιφανὴς καὶ ἀέριος) (43.17.32–4). The suppression of these metaphors of love results in a violation of the link between the "landscape of action" and the "landscape of consciousness" in Gregory's discourse, a link essential to the *narrative mode of thought*. According to Jerome Bruner, who introduced these terms, a story "must construct two landscapes simultaneously. One is the landscape of action. . . . The other landscape is the landscape of consciousness: what those involved in the action know, think, or feel, or do not know, think, or feel."<sup>4</sup>

In Gregory's discourse, rhetoric is the means by which he constructs an inner landscape of thought and feeling from the external events of his story. In his rhetorical imagination, the events mean something more and more important than they do in themselves.

Bruner's conceptualization of narrative thought may help us better to understand Aristotle's definition of the ἐπιδεικτικὸν γένος as a discourse in which the role of the listener as spectator is to be a judge of the power of the speech and the speaker—ὁ δὲ περὶ τῆς δυνάμεως ὁ θεωρὸς (*Rhetoric* 1.3, 1358b6). Attention is not focused on the future, as in the γένος συμβουλευτικόν or on past events, as in the γένος δικανικόν, but on the discourse as such. In this set toward the text itself, as well as in the selection of topics, the epideictic genre comes close to poetry, so close, in fact, that according to Heinrich Lausberg "it differs from it only by the absence of metre."<sup>5</sup>

Epideictic discourse, then, is poetry in prose. This implies that in our study of encomiastic literature, we shall have to look out for structures that are eminently poetic. A fundamental device in all poetry is the bringing together of two elements in a *parallelism*—that is, a relationship of similarity and difference, where one of the parts functions as a model for the other. In the following, I shall try to show how Gregory works as a poet, interpreting his relationship with Basil according to a model of *philia*, introduced into his discourse through the erotic vocabulary of his rhetoric.

Wounded by the arrow of affection, their friendship a manifest and conspicuous blaze, Gregory and Basil are filled with a *pothos*, a longing or desire, a mutual yearning to realize what is best in themselves and to devote themselves to *philosophia*, the pursuit of true wisdom:

4. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, 14.

5. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*, 130f.

When, as time went on, we confessed our innermost desire to each other, and above all that philosophy was what we wanted to pursue [τὸν πόθον ἀλλήλοις καθωμολογήσαμεν καὶ φιλοσοφίαν εἶναι τὸ σπουδαζόμενον], from that moment onwards we were everything to each other [τὰ πάντα ἡμεν ἀλλήλοις], roommates [ὁμόστεγοι], messmates [ὁμοδῖαιτοι], soulmates [συμφυεῖς] in contemplation of the One [τὸ ἐν βλέποντες], forever strengthening and intensifying each other's desire [ἀεὶ τὸν πόθον ἀλλήλοις συναύξοντες θερμότερόν τε καὶ βεβαιότερον]. For the love of body for body [οἱ μὲν γὰρ τῶν σωμάτων ἔρωτες], since it is transitory, passes like the flowers of spring. For neither will the flame last when the firewood is spent, but goes away with what kindles it, nor will desire remain when the incentive has been quenched. But a love that is divine and chaste, since its object is firm, is thereby firmer, and the fuller their vision of beauty, the more closely does beauty bind to itself and to each other lovers whose love is the same. This is the law that governed our love for each other. [Οἱ δὲ κατὰ Θεόν τε καὶ σώφρονες, ἐπειδὴ πράγματος ἐστὼς εἰσι, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ μονιμώτεροι, καὶ ὅσῳ πλέον αὐτοῖς τὸ κάλλος φαντάζεται, τοσούτῳ μᾶλλον ἑαυτῷ τε καὶ ἀλλήλοις συνδεῖ τοὺς τῶν αὐτῶν ἐραστάς. Οὗτος τοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς ἔρωτος νόμος.] (43.19.1–14)

It is not difficult to see that this distinction between the two forms of eros is "pure Platonism." It is a distinction we know from dialogues such as *Alcibiades*, *Lysis*, *Phaedros*, and the *Symposion*, in particular. Not only do we here find the image of "the fading flower of the body he so loved" (τῷ τοῦ σώματος ἀνθεὶ λήγοντι, οὔπερ ἥρα) (183e), it is in Pausanias's speech in the *Symposion* that we find a discussion of the dual nature of eros in combination with a survey of the varying νόμοι concerning eros (180c–185c).

But Platonism in Gregory is not the same as Platonism in Plato. In order to bring out the *differentia specifica* of Gregory's erotics, we shall have to try to define how Gregory transforms the Platonic heritage in order to formulate his own experience of same-sex *philia*.

Eros as expounded by Socrates in the *Symposion* and in the *Phaidros*, is, according to Kenneth Dover's definition of Plato's "philosophical *paiderastia*," "essentially an exaltation, however starved of bodily pleasure, of a consistent Greek tendency to regard homosexual eros as a compound of an educational with genital relationship."<sup>6</sup> Originally, Greek *paiderastia* was a relationship between man and boy,

*erastes* and *eromenos*, in which the *eromenos* was the object of the erotic desire of the *erastes*. The *erastes* sought, again according to Dover, "to win the love of the *eromenos* by his value as an exemplar and by the patience, devotion and skill which he displayed in training the *eromenos*." But on growing up, the *eromenos* normally "graduated from pupil to friend, and the continuance of an erotic relationship was disapproved, as was such a relationship between coevals."<sup>7</sup>

There must have been significant exceptions from these conventions, however, and again, the *Symposion* comes to mind, with the jesting reference to the erotic relationship of Pausanias and Agathon in Aristophanes' speech (193b7).

In Plato's dialogues, traditional *paiderastia* serves as the basis on which Socrates develops his metaphysical doctrine of *eros* as *philosophia*, love of wisdom. Socrates' playful variation on the old theme of *paiderastia* represents a "slippage," Douglas Hofstadter's term for a slight but vital movement from what is to what almost is.<sup>8</sup> This shift radically changes the relationship between the *erastes* and the *eromenos*. For in Platonic *eros*, the boy is no longer seen as the object of the *erastes*' sexual desire, but has himself become a subject whose object of desire is the older man's wisdom. A famous illustration of this new situation is Alcibiades' account in the *Symposion* of how he unsuccessfully tried to seduce Socrates, "for all the world as if I were an *erastes* with design on a *paidika*" (217c).

To Michel Foucault, Socrates as he appears in Alcibiades' tale is "invested with powers that are characteristic of the traditional figure of the *theios aner*." These powers "ensure the domination that Socrates is able to exercise over himself. . . and hence they qualify him as the highest object of love to which young men might appeal."<sup>9</sup> In this way, the pursuit of bodily pleasure is transformed into a joint effort of the two, the man and the boy, teacher and disciple, whose common pursuit of philosophy is rooted in their *eros*, their love for each other.

The Platonic shift from eros as leading to a desire for physical beauty, which is transient, to eros as arousing a yearning for eternal being as the ultimate object of *philosophia*, produces a new erotics,

7. Ibid., 202, 203.

8. Douglas Hofstadter's term as used by Carrithers, *Why Humans Have Cultures*, 69.

9. Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 214f.

6. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 202.

based on the principle of asceticism and renunciation of physical desire. In Christian asceticism a similar relationship developed between elder—ὁ γέρον— and novice, in which the love of the novice is directed toward his elder, like Socrates the young man's guide to truth and divine love.

An early example is the relationship of Gregory Thaumaturgos to his teacher Origen as he describes it in his "Thanksgiving speech," his λόγος χαριστήριος, probably given in 238.<sup>10</sup> The example is not fortuitously chosen, since the Thaumaturgos—founder of the church of Neocaesarea whose disciples Basil's grandmother had known personally—was one of the spiritual ancestors of the Cappadocians.<sup>11</sup> They may even have known his "Thanksgiving speech."<sup>12</sup>

In his account of Origen's relationship with his students, Gregory Thaumaturgos employs an erotic imagery analogous to that used by Gregory of Nazianzus in describing his friendship with Basil: Origen "used every possible means in order to bind us to him" (συνδήσασθαι πάντα τρόπον ἐμμηχανήσατο) (6.74).<sup>13</sup> First they were "wounded by the arrow of his discourse" (βεβλημένοι μὲν ὥσπερ τινὶ βέλει τῷ παρ' αὐτοῦ λόγῳ) (6.78), and then he "hurled the dart of friendship at us" (φιλίας ἡμῖν κέντρον ἐνέσκηψεν) (6.81) with the result that "the love of the holy and most lovable Word, who by his ineffable beauty attracts to himself all people, and the love of this man, his friend and spokesman, was kindled and set ablaze like a spark thrown into the midst of our soul" (Οἷος οὖν τις σπινθήρ, ἐνσκήψας μέση τῇ ψυχῇ ἡμῶν, ἀνίπτειτό τε καὶ ἐξεκαίετο ὃ τε πρὸς τὸν ἀπάντων ὑπὸ κάλλους ἀρρήτου ἐπακτικώτατον αὐτὸν λόγον τὸν ἱερὸν τὸν ἐρασμιώτατον, καὶ ὁ πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα τόνδε τὸν αὐτοῦ φίλον καὶ προήγορον ἔρως) (6.83). This is the decisive moment in Gregory's encounter with Origen:

Profoundly wounded by this love, we were persuaded not to care about all the matters or studies which seemed most proper to us, among others even my noble law studies, my country, and my family, those for whom we had set out on our journey. One thing only was dear to me and I loved only one thing, philosophy and her guide, this divine man. [ὃ μάλιστα τετρωμένος ἀπάντων τῶν δοκούν-

10. Crouzel, "Introduction," 22.

11. Van Dam, "Hagiography and History."

12. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 11f.

13. The text is quoted from Crouzel, ed., *Grégoire le Thaumaturge*, 94–195.

των ἡμῖν προσήκειν πραγμάτων ἢ μαθημάτων, τῶν τε ἄλλων καὶ αὐτῶν τῶν καλῶν μου νόμων, ἀμελεῖν ἐπειθόμην πατρίδος τε καὶ οἰκείων, τῶν τε παρόντων ἐνταῦθα καὶ οἷς ἀπεδημήσαμεν. "὘ν δὲ μοι φίλον ἦν καὶ ἀγαπώμενον, φιλοσοφία τε καὶ ὁ ταύτης καθηγεμὼν οὗτος ὁ θεῖος ἄνθρωπος." (6.84)

The *philia* of Gregory and his teacher represents a relationship not unlike the relationship between Socrates and his pupils. In his spiritual ascent towards the divine, Origen—the *theios anthropos*, the "friend" and "spokesman" of the holy Word—has, in the eyes of his disciple already transcended the human condition. It is the "most godlike" in him—ὅ τι θεοειδέστατον αὐτοῦ (2.13)—that enables him to play the part of a mediator between the divine and the disciple in an erotic relationship that requires that the latter should break all other bonds and submit his will to that of his guide and master.

With the help of his Platonic rhetoric, the Thaumaturgos constructs a *philia* based on the submission of the disciple under the divine authority of the master. It is this hierarchical relationship that has prevailed in Eastern monasticism to this day. And it is this type of friendship that Dostoevsky describes in Alyosha Karamazov's loving relationship with the elder Zosima, his spiritual father.

Gregory's experience of divine eros is different, and the language he employs in order to convey its meaning to his audience is also markedly different from the λόγος χαριστήριος, in spite of the striking coincidence in their use of erotic imagery. In contrast to this father-son relationship, the friendship between Gregory and Basil is construed, not in terms of submission and hierarchy, but in terms of equality, equality of age as well as social status. Their love of truth and of each other is not marked by the dissymmetry and inequality characterizing the master-disciple relationship. Basil and Gregory are coevals, and when they meet, they are both students. David Konstan makes a point of emphasizing that "Gregory believed in the classical ideal of friendship as a reciprocal loving relationship between equal and virtuous people."<sup>14</sup>

Gregory and Basil are equals, and their equality is emphasized throughout in Gregory's account of their friendship. In the paragraph already quoted, they are said to be everything to each other

14. David Konstan, "How to Praise a Friend: Gregory of Nazianzus' Funeral Oration for Basil," chapter 7, p. 176, in this volume.

(τὰ πάντα ἡμεν ἀλλήλοις), roommates (ὁμόστέγοι), messmates (ὁμοδίαιτοι), soulmates (συμφυεῖς).” In the following chapter, Gregory takes this theme still further:

Such was our relationship, and having supported our well-walled chamber with such pillars of gold, as Pindar puts it, we went forward, relying on God and our desire [Οὕτω δὲ τὰ πρὸς ἀλλήλοις ἔχοντες καὶ τοιαύτας ὑποστήσαντες εὐτειχεῖ θαλάμῳ χρυσέας κίονας, ὃ φησι Πίνδαρος, οὕτως ἡμεν εἰς τὸ πρὸς Θεῷ καὶ πόθῳ συνεργοῖς χρῶμενοι (43.20.1–4)]. . . . It was as if one soul carried the bodies of us both, and even though those who say that all things are in all are not to be believed, we are to be believed that we were in each other and next to each other. [Μία μὲν ἀμφοτέροις ἐδόκει ψυχὴ δύο σώματα φέρουσα, καὶ εἰ τὸ πάντα ἐν πᾶσι κεῖσθαι μὴ πειστέον τοῖς λέγουσιν, ἀλλ’ ἡμῖν γε πειστέον ὥς ἐν ἀλλήλοις καὶ παρ’ ἀλλήλοις ἐκείμεθα. (43.20.9–12)]

The spiritual oneness of the two friends is so complete that when Gregory on their return to Cappadocia is at first unable to be reunited with Basil, “though no longer together . . . desire kept us together (οὐ σὺν ἀλλήλοις μὲν ἔτι . . . τῷ πόθῳ δὲ σὺν ἀλλήλοις) (43.25.6–7).

At Athens, Gregory and Basil had been able to combine a life together with life in the community. They had, “best of all, been surrounded by a far from ignoble band, under his instruction and guidance, and delighting in the same things” (τὸ κάλλιστον ὅτι καὶ φρατρία τις περὶ ἡμᾶς οὐκ ἀγεννῆς ἦν, ὑπ’ ἐκείνῳ καθηγεμόνι παιδευομένη καὶ ἀγομένη καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς χαίρουσα) (43.22.1–3). In this community, the two friends were “a not inglorious pair” (ξυνωρεῖς οὐκ ἀνώνυμος) (43.22.12). In the eyes of their teachers and comrades, “the Oresteses and Pyladeses were nothing compared to us” (Οὐδὲν τοιοῦτον αὐτοῖς οἱ Ὀρέσται οἱ Πυλάδαι) (43.22.13–14). And when Basil decided to go home while Gregory was persuaded to stay on, “it was like cutting one body into two parts and killing both, or the separation of two bullocks who have shared the same manger and the same yoke, amid pitiable bellowings after one another in protest against the separation” (γίνεται γὰρ ὥσπερ ἑνὸς σώματος εἰς δύο τομῇ καὶ ἀμφοτέρων νέκρωσις ἢ μόσχων συντρόφων καὶ ὁμοζύγων διάψεξις, γοερὸν μυκωμένων ἐπ’ ἀλλήλοις καὶ οὐ φερόντων τὴν ἀλλοτριώσιν) (43.24.22–25). These images of separation and loss, with their strong emotive and protreptic overtones, culminate in Greg-

ory’s joyful representation of himself galloping over the plains like Homer’s horse to be reunited with his friend.

Michel Foucault, in *The Use of Pleasure*, the second volume of his *History of Sexuality*, notes that in Plato’s dialogues “one sees the formation, in Greek culture and in connection with the love of boys, of some of the major elements of a sexual ethics that will renounce that love by appealing to the [principle of ‘infinite abstention’]: the requirement of a symmetry and reciprocity in the love relationship; the necessity of a long and arduous struggle with oneself; the gradual purification of a love that is addressed only to being per se, in its truth; and man’s inquiry into himself as a subject of desire.”<sup>15</sup>

In Gregory’s friendship story, this Platonism serves as a model that enabled him to give coherence and meaning to his life with Basil, transforming their common pursuit of *philosophia* into a meaningful quest for true being in the Christian sense of divine truth. In the cognitive sciences, the study of such models has become crucial in the analysis of our moral understanding. Mark Johnson calls them “idealized cognitive models” in his *Moral Imagination*.<sup>16</sup> One of their distinctive features is their *underdetermination*, which means that cognitive models are reinterpretable, leaving an essential role to invention and creativity. This is why Gregory’s rhetoric of friendship represents a variation on the theme of Platonic eros, his understanding of it.

Back into the mainstream of his discourse, however, Gregory changes rhetorical register. Leaving the ranks of the beardless, the two friends “advanced in philosophy in a more manlike manner” (τελοῦμεν εἰς ἄνδρας ἐξ ἀγεννέων, ἀνδρικώτερον τῇ φιλοσοφίᾳ προσβαίνοντες) (43.25.5–6). Gregory has reached the part of his speech in which he, following the conventions of the genre, goes over to describe Basil’s *πράξεις*, his public life, and his rise in the hierarchy of the Church.

The task of depicting Basil’s life in Caesarea and his career in the Church, demanded a mode of expression that was different from the language of *eros* and *philia*. Gregory’s rhetorical interpretation of Basil’s ascent and his struggle against the heretics at times takes the form of a *psogos* directed against the enemies. Where his rhetoric of

15. Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 245.

16. Johnson, *Moral Imagination*, 94.

friendship might have been adequate, for instance in the account of how he joined Basil in Pontos, in one of the monasteries there—τοῖς ἐκεῖσε φροντιστηρίοις (43.29.8)—and how they were able once more to pursue their philosophical studies together, Gregory is surprisingly laconic, not even mentioning their compilation of the *Philokalia*—the collection of excerpts from Origen's various works—which we know from other sources that they were engaged in. In his praise of Basil as a churchman, Gregory employs a rhetoric in which quotations from and allusions to the Bible and to Christian theology are the main constituents. As a priest, Basil became a model to all others—τοῖς πολλοῖς τύπος καθίσταται (43.27.3). In his description of Basil's struggle against the Arians, Gregory composed the following tirade, so typical of the Christian encomion:

To some he became a strong wall and rampart [Jer. 1.18],  
to others an axe breaking the rock to pieces [Jer. 23.2]  
or a fire among the thorns [Ps. 117.12]  
as divine Scripture says,  
easily destroying the fagots that were insulting the Godhead.  
And if the Barnabas who speaks and records these things,  
had some shares in the struggles of Paul,  
the thanks are due to Paul,  
who chose him and made him his partner in the conflict. [43.32.9–15]

γίνεται τοῖς μὲν τεῖχος ὀκρὸν καὶ χαράκωμα,  
τοῖς δὲ πέλεκυς κόπτων πέτραν  
ἢ πῦρ ἐν ἀκάνθαις  
ὃ φησὶν ἡ θεία γραφή,  
ῥαδίως ἀναλίσκον τοὺς φρυγανώδεις τῆς θεότητος.  
Εἰ δέ τι καὶ Βαρνάβας, ὁ ταῦτα λέγων καὶ γράφων,  
Παύλῳ συνηγωνίσαστο,  
Παύλῳ χάρις  
τῷ προελομένῳ καὶ συνεργὸν ποιησαμένῳ τοῦ ἀγωνίσματος.

In this passage, the fire metaphor is no longer that of Platonic erotics, but is taken over from Old Testament rhetoric. And the syncretism no longer juxtaposes the two friends with famous pairs in the Greek tradition, but sees them in analogy to the relationship between Paul and his disciple. It is as if from this stage on, Gregory interprets his friendship with Basil according to a different model, reflecting a change in their relationship, as if the two friends no longer share the same concept of *philia*.

Basil was able to combine his philosophic life with his priestly vocation and concern with the life of the community. Gregory wanted to do the same. In *Eis τὸν ἑαυτοῦ βίον*, his autobiographical poem, he describes how he sought to combine a life in contemplation of the divine books with an active life for the common good (296–312). But he was unable to reconcile the contemplative aspect of *philia* as a joint quest for divine wisdom with the turbulent life of a fourth-century churchman. As Philip Rousseau observes in his discussion of their row over Basil's appointment of Gregory as bishop of Sasima:

It would be wrong to imagine that so long-standing and fundamental a friendship could be destroyed completely. . . . It was Gregory, however, who did most to heal the breach; and that willingness allows us to interpret more justly the subsequent rumblings of indignation that surface here and there in his writings. What the whole incident had made clear was that the two men had drawn apart in their interpretation of the priestly vocation and, correspondingly, of the philosophic life. For Basil the twin aspirations were compatible, in that within the priesthood itself the most precious components of φιλοσοφία could reach fulfillment. For Gregory there remained a constant sense of divergence, in that the priesthood, "this mean and treacherous mart of souls," presented a constant threat to the philosophic way of life.<sup>17</sup>

And, we might add, to *philia*. After he had become a bishop, Basil "built up a network of contacts, acquaintances, relatives, clients, and of friends in the richest sense."<sup>18</sup> Gregory's understanding of friendship as a reciprocal loving relationship between two equals, united in their quest for divine truth, was, however, irreconcilable with Basil's status as a prince of the Church. And although Gregory found a model for their new relationship in Paul and Barnabas, their friendship was never the same after Athens. At the conclusion of his funeral speech, Gregory reverts to the theme of separation, turning toward his audience in a final lament at the loss of his friend:

And now he is in heaven and there, I believe, he is offering sacrifices for us and praying for the people, for having left us, he has not abandoned us altogether. As for me, Gregory, half dead and cut in two,

17. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 237.

18. *Ibid.*, 234.

cut off from our great union and leading a life of pain and out of course, which is natural, separated from him, I no longer know how it will end without his guidance, even though I am still admonished and chastened through nightly visions if it happens that I fail to do my duty. (43.80.24–32)<sup>19</sup>

Here, Basil has become part of a higher reality and seen in a *di-sotto-in-su* perspective typical of Christian hagiography, he appears from high above to Gregory, not as an equal, but as spiritual guide and master.

In his study of monastic friendship in the West, *Friendship and Community*, Brian Patrick McGuire suggests that "the only complete history of friendship would also have to be a history of the modes of expressing grief. . . . for in lamenting over the dead friend, one describes what he meant in one's life."<sup>20</sup> This is true also of the friendship between Gregory and Basil. But in the end, Gregory's model of male friendship as a relationship between two equals united in their erotic quest for divine wisdom had to give way to the master-disciple relationship that was for centuries to become the standard model of Christian love.

19. Καὶ νῦν ὁ μὲν ἐστὶν ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ κατὰ τὰς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, οἶμαι, προσφέρων θυσίας καὶ τοῦ λαοῦ προευχόμενος· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀπολιπὼν ἡμᾶς παντάπασιν ἀπολέλοιπεν. Ἡμιθὴς δὲ Γρηγόριος καὶ ἡμίτομος, τῆς μεγάλης ἀπερρωγῆς συζυγίας καὶ βίον ἔλκων ὀδυνηρὸν καὶ οὐκ εὐδρομον, οἷον εἰκὸς τὸν ἐκείνου κεχωρισμένον, οὐκ οἶδα εἰς ὃ τελευτήσων μετὰ τὴν ἐκείνου παιδαγωγίαν ἣ καὶ νῦν ἔτι νουθετοῦμαι καὶ σωφρονίζομαι διὰ νυκτερινῶν ὄψεων εἰ ποτε τοῦ δέοντος ἔξω πέσοιμι.

20. McGuire, *Friendship and Community*, xvi.

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## The Rhetoric of Praise in the Private Orations of Themistius

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Themistius is a figure who deserves more attention than he has hitherto received. He is "[i]n some important ways . . . the most significant politician [in the East] outside of the emperors and their court officials during the period of his active service."<sup>1</sup> Beginning as a teacher of philosophy, he came to the notice of the emperor Constantius, who adlected him to the Constantinopolitan senate in 355. He quickly became prominent, serving as the last proconsul of Constantinople in the late 350s.<sup>2</sup> In 357, he had headed a senatorial embassy to Rome, and, in the last years of the decade, he was a key recruiter of new senators for Constantinople. In the mid 380s, high office came to him a second time, when the emperor Theodosius appointed him urban prefect of Constantinople, a post that replaced the urban proconsulship in 359. Between the proconsulship and the prefecture, Themistius remained a respected person in Constantinople, representing his city as an ambassador and advising emperors. Throughout his life, though, he regarded philosophy as his primary vocation.<sup>3</sup> Oratory was almost as important: Themistius believed that the truths of philosophy needed to be broadcast widely and that rhetoric was the chief instrument for accomplishing this.

1. For biographical details, see now esp. Vanderspoel, *Themistius and the Imperial Court*. The quotation is Vanderspoel's judgment (p. 220). The University of California Press has published my annotated English translation of Themistius's private orations (20–34), and the Translated Texts for Historians series (University of Liverpool) has announced that it will bring out an anthology of his orations in English (1, 3, 5, 6, 14–16, 34). One hopes that these publications will now draw more students of late antiquity to Themistius.

2. I agree with Daly that Themistius did in fact hold the proconsulship, "Themistius' Refusal of a Magistracy," against Dagron, "Empire romain," 213–17, and Vanderspoel, *Themistius*, 106–8.

3. See *Or.* 31.353c–54c, from the mid 380s.

In an age of accelerating Christianization, Themistius was a pagan in the service of Christian emperors (Constantius, Jovian, Valens, and Theodosius). He proved to be very adaptable. No supporter of the pagan emperor Julian's religious zealotry,<sup>4</sup> he asked the Christian emperor Jovian to tolerate all religions and tried to turn the Arian Valens away from persecuting Nicene Christians. We still find references to "the gods" in Themistius's orations to Christian emperors (e.g., 2.27c–d, 7.86b–c, 15.193d); but he can also make use of the Old Testament in their service.<sup>5</sup> Mainly, however, his response to the religious battles of his day was "to eliminate religion as an essential part of the cultural heritage," offering "a bridge between old and new" on the basis of "ideals that all could accept."<sup>6</sup>

Juxtaposing the phrase "rhetoric of praise" and the name "Themistius," as in the title of this chapter, leads one immediately to think of his imperial panegyrics, the so-called λόγοι πολιτικοί, the "political" or "public" orations, numbers 1 through 19, minus the spurious Latin *Oration* 12. My interest here, though, is in the few encomiastic pieces or passages that occur in the heterogeneous private orations. I shall investigate Themistius's intentions in the encomiastic private *Orations* 20, 30, and 34, arguing that he is doing more in them than merely praising the immediate subject of his *encomia*. I also comment in passing on Themistius's employment of the *topoi* of praise in *Oration* 20. Finally, I move to the fragmentary *Oration* 33 and argue that the lost section of this piece would have presented us with yet another example of the rhetoric of praise in a private oration.

### ORATION 20: PRAISE AS SELF-ADVERTISEMENT

We begin with *Oration* 20, an *epitaphios* or funeral oration in honor of Themistius's recently deceased father, Eugenius. Like his son, Eugenius was a philosopher. His death occurred in the fall of 355, when Themistius was in his late thirties and had already been teaching philosophy for a number of years. Themistius's public career, though,

4. Themistius may have been politically marginalized under Julian: Dagron, "Empire romain," 230–35; Daly, "In a Borderland"; Vanderspoel, *Themistius*, 115–34. But Brauch, "Themistius and the Emperor Julian," has recently argued against this view.

5. See Downey, "Allusions to Christianity in Themistius' Orations," but with the comments of Colpi, *Die παιδεία des Themistios*, 197; Vanderspoel, *Themistius*, 207.

6. Vanderspoel, *Themistius*, 19, 217.

was just beginning in 355, with his adlection to the Constantinopolitan senate on September 1 of that very year.<sup>7</sup>

Themistius begins his funeral oration by noting Eugenius's special devotion to Aristotle. This devotion, Themistius explains, did not preclude an openness to other philosophical schools. If Aristotle held first place for Eugenius, Plato was a close second. Eugenius was convinced of the essential compatibility of the two classical philosophers, noting that Aristotle could serve as an excellent propaedeutic and logical support for Plato. Eugenius, Themistius continues, knew Pythagoras and the Stoic Zeno and could even see some small good in Epicureanism. In his view, "all [schools of philosophy] reach the same point in the end, however much they wind about" (236b). The emperor Julian would agree, affirming that "philosophy is one, and [that] virtually all philosophers have sought a single goal, though reaching it by diverse roads" (*Orat.* 9.186a Rochefort, and also see 184c–86a *passim*).<sup>8</sup>

Eugenius, we are told, had a literary as well as a philosophical breadth: Themistius notes his command of Homer, Menander, Euripides, Sophocles, Sappho, and Pindar. But the philosophical and the literary should not be seen as two disconnected spheres in Eugenius. In referring to his father's knowledge of Homer, Themistius calls the poet "the origin and source of Aristotle's and Plato's teachings" (236b). Philosophical wisdom could be had from Homer through either a literal or an allegorical understanding of the poet's text; or Homer's narrative could provide moral exempla.<sup>9</sup> And, as Themistius's own orations illustrate, Homer was not the only classical author who, while not properly a philosopher, could nonetheless be mined for philosophical insights. Respecting literature as something not "alien to philosophy" (236c), Eugenius was broadened by it:

7. For the time of Eugenius's death and Themistius's age then, see Vanderspoel, *Themistius*, 31, 89–90. The date of Themistius's adlection is found in a scholion to the so-called *Demegoria Constantii* 18c, which may be found in the third volume of the Teubner *Themistius*, ed. Schenkl, Downey, and Norman, *Themistii orationes*, 3: 121–28.

8. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. Translations of passages from Themistius's *Orations* are based on the Teubner edition unless otherwise indicated.

9. See, e.g., Buffière, *Mythes d'Homère*; Kindstrand, *Homer in der Zweiten Sophistik*, 124–26, 168–71, for Homer as (*philo*)*sophos* in Dio Chrys. and Max. Tyr., and note also ps.-Plut. *De Homero* 2.144; Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*.

Themistius contends that his father's wide reading made it easier for him to share his philosophical wisdom with the whole of humanity; he was not merely a narrow technical expert.

After describing Eugenius's *paideia*, Themistius next points out that he was a genuine philosopher (237b–39d). Eugenius consequently insisted that discourse should aim to better the soul, not to provide pleasure and be charming. He also insisted that engaging in philosophical discourse does not in itself make a true philosopher. What is essential is acting in accordance with philosophy's principles, as Socrates did. Themistius not only reports Eugenius's admiration of Socrates but also goes on to compare him to the great philosopher. He then compares him, in his fight against moral evil, to Heracles—Heracles the "paradigm of virtue" (240a).

Two aspects of *Oration* 20 merit attention. First, what is missing from it. Menander Rhetor prescribes a range of encomiastic topics for the funeral oration (2.420): family, birth, nature (which means "physical beauty" as well as "mental endowment"), nurture, education, conduct, actions, and fortune (examples of fortune being "wealth, happiness of children, love of friends, honour from emperors, honour from cities").<sup>10</sup> But in *Oration* 20, Themistius restricts himself to his father's mature *paideia*, his accomplishments, character, and principles. The "missing" topics, from the viewpoint of Menander's model, are family, birth, early years and rearing, and physical and material glories.

Themistius's assertion in the *θεωρία* or preliminary comment to *Oration* 20 that a brief oration is what the occasion demanded could be read as an apology for the omission of a number of expected encomiastic topics. The orator promises in the *θεωρία* that full details will be provided in a future biography of his father, but we have no evidence that this biography was ever written. Of course, Themistius could have been brief and still have touched upon the missing encomiastic topics. One suspects, though, that those topics fell victim not so much to Themistius's desire for brevity as to his judgment that they were inappropriate or at least expendable in an *encomium* of a philosopher. Indeed, in his praise of nonphilosophers, too, Themistius em-

10. I am using the edition and translation of Menander by Russell and Wilson, but I translate ἐπιτηδεύματα as "conduct" rather than "accomplishments."



phasizes themes of philosophical import, asserting in *Oration* 1.1a–3a, in praise of the emperor Constantius, that the panegyrist's business is to admire the things of the soul rather than those of the body, and explaining in *Oration* 18.218d, in praise of the emperor Theodosius, that a philosophical *encomium* will praise what is truly worth admiring, not gifts of fortune such as power, skill, or wealth. The rubrics for an *encomium* were fixed and could be anticipated by an audience, but the ancients did find ways of adapting them, and one method of adaptation was simply to refrain from using all the available rubrics—in the case of *Oration* 20, to refrain from using those rubrics that did not bear directly on soul and character.

The second point of interest about *Oration* 20 is that several features of Eugenius's *paideia* that Themistius celebrates in it are also features of Themistius's own intellectual culture: an Aristotelianism that does not close the door on other philosophical schools and is especially allied with Platonism, a literary breadth, a desire to broadcast philosophical wisdom to the whole of society, and the condemnation of a rhetoric that aims merely to please and charm (234d–36d, 237c–d). The marriage of Aristotelianism and Platonism in Eugenius and Themistius is a distinctive one, subordinating Plato to Aristotle in contrast to Neoplatonism's subordination of Aristotle to Plato. By Themistius's literary breadth (which does not necessarily entail depth), I mean his drawing on the whole of the Hellenic heritage in his orations rather than presenting himself as a narrow philosophical technician. The need for philosophy to address the whole of society rather than be an esoteric specialty is one of Themistius's central tenets. And so is the rejection of a rhetoric that is not in the service of something higher than pleasure.<sup>11</sup> In *Oration* 20, then, Themistius is doing more than merely praising the subject of his oration; he is also advertising his own intellectual culture.<sup>12</sup>

11. For Plato and Aristotle in Themistius's thought, see Colpi, *Die παιδεία des Themistios*, 97–98, and more generally 85–110; Vanderspoel, *Themistius*, 20–22. In *Or.* 2, written close to the time of Eugenius's death, Themistius says that Aristotle is, in effect, his model and guide: ὃν προὔταξάνην τοῦ βίου τε καὶ τῆς σοφίας (26d). For Aristotle's place in Neoplatonism, see Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 23–25. For Themistius's knowledge of Greek literature and of philosophers other than Plato and Aristotle, see Colpi, *Die παιδεία des Themistios*. For philosophy's need to address the whole of society and for the rejection of hedonistic rhetoric, see Vanderspoel, *Themistius*, 10–11.

12. Vanderspoel already makes the point, *Themistius*, 91.

#### ORATION 34: PRAISE IN SELF-DEFENSE

*Encomium* again does two things at once in Themistius's *Oration* 34. We are now in the year 384 or 385.<sup>13</sup> In the thirty years since he delivered *Oration* 20, Themistius had enjoyed a distinguished career as a senator and a man of influence at court. He had just stepped down from a relatively brief tenure of the urban prefecture of Constantinople. While in that office, he was criticized by senators and others for having betrayed philosophy by being active in public affairs. Some of this criticism (for example, that leveled at him by fellow philosophers) may well have been sincere; but one cannot help suspecting that the senatorial critics were Themistius's political rivals and opponents. Themistius had already addressed his critics in *Oration* 31, delivered before the Constantinopolitan senate, probably while he was still in office as urban prefect.<sup>14</sup> In that oration, he insists that "the kind of philosophy that operates in the public arena" (352c) has a venerable pedigree. He maintains that he did not accept the urban prefecture and other public honors on the mistaken assumption that office leads to virtue or for self-advancement or on a quid pro quo basis; nor did he actively seek out such honors. Rather, all was done for the public good. Virtue and learning already achieved grounded everything. Philosophy, he says, remains his primary "office."

*Oration* 34 continues the apologetic of *Oration* 31. Themistius speaks this time, not to the senate, but to a mixed group of Constantinopolitans.<sup>15</sup> The emperor Theodosius is present (see 34.1, 21, 22), and so is one particular critic of Themistius, to whom he sometimes specifically addresses his remarks (9, 12, 16, 27, 28, 30). In arguing on this occasion that it is appropriate for a philosopher to be active in public affairs and even to accept office, that such behavior is "keeping within ancestral bounds" (1), and that he did not accept the urban prefecture out of ambition (9), Themistius reiterates what he had already stated in *Oration* 31. But there is a new concern in *Oration* 34. Themistius is no longer in office. Looking back over his tenure, he

13. Dagron, "Empire romain," 26; Vanderspoel, *Themistius*, 214.

14. Dagron, "Empire romain," 26; Vanderspoel, *Themistius*, 209.

15. Note the second person plural in sections 1, 2, 10, 13, 25, 29. The audience included some orphans whom Theodosius had helped (18). There are no grounds for making this speech an address to the senate (*pace* Maisano, *Discorsi di Temistio*, 990, n. 5).

affirms that it was meritorious despite its brevity (10–11). The tone is perhaps defensive rather than smug. Themistius may have been forced to resign from office. Gilbert Dagron suggests that Themistius the philosopher may have fit badly into an urban prefecture that had become more and more bureaucratic.<sup>16</sup>

If *Oration 34* has a new concern, it also has a new apologetic tactic. Nearly half of it consists of a panegyric on the emperor Theodosius. He is lauded as a philosopher in the purple, Plato's ideal ruler, a source of good and a bulwark against evil. Past governmental abuses are absent from his reign. His *philanthropia* is said to manifest itself in his foreign as well as in his domestic policy, for in 382 he made peace in the Balkans, not by destroying the Visigoths, but by sparing them and admitting them into the Empire. Themistius himself senses that, from a formal point of view, his panegyric of Theodosius in *Oration 34* is disproportionately long, occurring as it does in what purports to be a speech of self-defense<sup>17</sup>: "[O]ne point after another gets hold of me," he says, "and diverts me from the theme of my oration. I have not come here intending to enumerate all the praiseworthy actions of our ruler" (19). Yet even if the panegyric is overly long, it is not alien to Themistius's theme, because, as he immediately explains, "[m]y purpose in praising [Theodosius] is to show that I myself am a man of good judgment, that in associating with [him by accepting the urban prefecture] I did not bring philosophy down, but lifted her up." The praise does, of course, honor the emperor, who is present. It also serves to disarm the charge that the emperor himself was wrong in offering an office to a philosopher (1). But its main purpose in this oration is to assist Themistius in his self-defense by changing the question "How could a philosopher have accepted public office?" to "Who could have failed to come to the aid of such an ideal ruler?" (14). The answer, of course, is that no one could have failed to do so, the panegyric portion of the oration having established that Theodosius is

16. Schneider, *Die 34. Rede des Themistios*, 15; Dagron, "Empire romain," 49; id., *Naissance d'une capitale*, 253, 276–77.

17. See Schneider, *Die 34. Rede des Themistios*, 20–21: "Solche Lobreden fehlen zwar in der Gerichtsrede nicht völlig, aber die Länge der vorliegenden [i.e., that of *Or. 34*]—das Lob des Kaisers nimmt zwei Fünftel der ganzen Rede ein—ist doch ungewöhnlich." Schneider says "two fifths" because he regards the "Lobrede" as extending from section 16 through section 27; but panegyric material actually occurs before section 16.

indeed an ideal incarnate. Once again, then, *encomium* accomplishes more than merely praising its subject. In *Oration 20*, praise of Eugenius's *paideia* was also advertisement of the encomiast's own *paideia*; in *Oration 34*, praise of Theodosius's character helps, by a kind of osmosis, to acquit the encomiast who is closely associated with the emperor.

#### ORATION 30: MORE THAN A TRITE ENCOMIUM?

My last example of this rhetorical situation—of *encomium* doing more than merely praising its immediate subject—is *Oration 30*, although here I have to make my case through conjecture. *Oration 30* is a short piece—four and one half Teubner pages long—in praise of agriculture. Drawing on what had become *topoi* on the subject,<sup>18</sup> it lauds agriculture as the sine qua non of human civilization, as, in Xenophon's words, "the mother and nurse of the other arts" (*Oeconom.* 5.17). This piece is apparently a simple, trite *progymnasma* rather than an ambitious oration. *Progymnasmata* were preliminary rhetorical exercises. There were fourteen progymnasmatic modes, *encomium* being one of them.<sup>19</sup> The teacher of rhetoric would sometimes provide fair copies of the various modes for his pupils. A collection of such model *progymnasmata* survives in the Libanian corpus and includes an *encomium* of agriculture comparable to Themistius's *Oration 30* (*Progymn.* 8.7 Foerster). That a single such exercise having no further import should survive in the Themistian corpus is certainly possible, but the preservation of such a piece would be puzzling. Themistius was not a teacher of rhetoric, and all his other private orations contain weightier stuff: autobiography, cultural polemics and programatics, moral philosophy. I would suggest, as I have pointed out in the cases of *Oration 20* and *Oration 34*, that Themistius was doing more in *Oration 30* than merely praising his immediate subject (agriculture), and that this "more"—which, in this case, we can only guess at—is what gave the piece its interest and warranted its preservation. Two Themistian scholars have already, and very recently, taken

18. For the conceptual background, Kier's 1933 dissertation, *De laudibus vitae rusticae*, is still a valuable resource.

19. For the progymnasmatic modes, see Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric*, 54–73.

this same position, although the details of my own reconstruction differ from theirs.

John Vanderspoel hypothesizes that *Oration* 30 has an autobiographical significance. In *Oration* 20.236d–37b we learn that Themistius's father Eugenius enjoyed farming in his old age. He "praised agriculture highly and loved it," says Themistius, and he declared it a suitable endeavor for a philosopher in retirement. Vanderspoel suspects that *Oration* 30 is "linked to [Eugenius's] retirement."<sup>20</sup> We might well imagine Themistius composing it in the early 350s as a rhetorical gift for his father. Or it may have been composed earlier and without reference to his father and presented to him at a later time, after its theme had acquired a relevance to his activity in retirement.

Riccardo Maisano suggests that *Oration* 30 had a sociopolitical purpose: to encourage agricultural productivity.<sup>21</sup> In a not dissimilar vein, I would propose that this oration may be celebrating as much as encouraging agricultural productivity. When Themistius points out in *Oration* 30 that agriculture tames the wildness in human beings, when he notes that some lawmakers have "safeguarded peace so that the digger and the plowman would be free from fear," and when he remarks that kings "put their hopes . . . in the blessings of agriculture" and are at a loss "unless the interests of those who nourish the community take precedence over the whole military establishment" (349c–d, 350c, 351c), he may be alluding to Theodosius's Visigothic treaty of 382, to the peace it secured for the farmers of the Balkans, and to the Visigoths settled within the Empire, who themselves became farmers.<sup>22</sup> In *Oration* 34.22, 24, he tells Theodosius that "you have acquired more farmers for us" (that is, Visigoths settled in the Empire through the treaty of 382), and he tells the Thracians and Macedonians that "it is time to sharpen your sickles instead of your swords and javelins."

If one is prepared to accept a conjecture, then, in *Oration* 30 praise of agriculture is something that, once again, is more than what it appears to be: it is also either a compliment to Eugenius for having taken up that pursuit, or an encouragement of agriculture, or a cele-

bration of the restoration and expansion of agricultural activity in the Balkans through Theodosius's treaty of 382.

#### THE LOST ENCOMIUM OF ORATION 33

We move now from a conjecture about Themistius's intentions in an extant *encomium* to a conjecture that a Themistian oration that survives only in part, *Oration* 33, once contained an encomiastic passage. The modern ordering of the orations of Themistius, as has already been pointed out, results in a neat division of the corpus into two parts: the "political" or public orations and the private orations. The public orations are formal imperial panegyrics. We have seen that praise of an emperor can also occur in a private oration: the private *Oration* 34 praises Theodosius. But praise of Theodosius is not the primary purpose of *Oration* 34; the occasion is "private," not "political" or public, and the imperial panegyric is subservient to the speaker's private, apologetic purpose. *Orations* 25 and 28 may be additional examples, on a much smaller scale, of the situation we find in *Oration* 34: in both cases, some words of praise are offered to an ἄρχων who is present in the audience, although praise of the ἄρχων is not the primary purpose of either oration. The problem in *Orations* 25 and 28, though, is that we cannot be sure that the person in the audience whom Themistius calls an ἄρχων is an emperor: the word ἄρχων can refer to various officials below the emperor.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, I think that we can be fairly confident that the lost portion of the fragmentary *Oration* 33 would have given us another example of the praise of an emperor in a private oration.

Only the opening of *Oration* 33 survives, the text breaking off in mid-paragraph (and mid-sentence) after a few pages. *Oration* 33 was a philosophical sermon, delivered at Constantinople, and, in the extant opening pages, Themistius underscores how unpopular and discomforting such sermonizing could be. The philosopher might, for example, have to disabuse people of the belief that happiness con-

20. Themistius, 84; cf. Maisano, *Discorsi*, 935.

21. Maisano, *Discorsi*, 935.

22. See Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 156–57.

23. For the wide application of ἄρχ- words, see Mason, *Greek Terms for Roman Institutions*, 26 (s.v. ἀρχή), 27 (s.v. ἄρχων), 110–13. For ἄρχων in the late Empire applied to a praetorian prefect, note Liban. *Epp.* 840.5 ed. Foerster, with *PLRE* 1 s.v. "Tatianus 5"; applied to a vicar, Theodoret *Hist. eccl.* 3.7.5 ed. Parmentier, with *PLRE* 1 s.v. "Capitolinus 2"; applied to a provincial governor, Liban. *Epp.* 308.2, with *PLRE* 1 s.v. "Acacius 8."

sists in the possession of material wealth. If by "happiness" we mean "wealth," then we are using the word *happiness* in an inappropriate and degenerate way. It is just this kind of linguistic critique that Themistius is engaged in here: he wants to "put some very . . . well-known words to the test and show you what meaning they had when they first gained currency . . . and then how most people . . . put false . . . usages of them into circulation" (366d). Words—for example, the words βασιλεύς and ὑπατος—lose their original value just as coins do. It is at this point, as Themistius is about to explain the original and true sense of the words βασιλεύς and ὑπατος, that *Oration* 33 breaks off. The final lines of extant text (367b–c) are as follows:

The words that we humans use often suffer the same fate as our coins: they do not always retain, through the whole course of time, the same value or as high a value as they had initially—precisely what has happened to those coins of the recent past that were driven out of the marketplace a short time ago. Or don't you remember that, right after the first of those bronze coins went into circulation, they were well regarded and had a high value, and they would have brought you quite a good return for a modest outlay; but that in the course of being offered as tender—and I mean after only a short while—they did not maintain their value < . . . and ><sup>24</sup> are utterly useless when they turn up in shops? The very famous and celebrated words βασιλεύς and ὑπατος have suffered just such a fate, though we can be glad that, for so many years, they allowed us to designate one and the same person<sup>25</sup> in two ways.

And now that these two words have been put before you, my oration has reached the point at which its task is to reveal and explain<sup>26</sup> to you what kind of person would enjoy the hard-won distinction of having both terms applied to him in their true sense and without any hint of flattery. My oration must also inform you that it is rarer to encounter such a person than to see the phoenix, a bird that, according to the storyteller Herodotus [2.73], appears among the Egyptians every five hundred years in the temple. . . .

What I understand Themistius to be saying here is this: The use of the word βασιλεύς to designate any monarch at all and the use of the word ὑπατος as an equivalent of the Latin *consul* are linguistic de-

24. I follow Seeck, *Briefe des Libanius*, 293n, in assuming a lacuna here.

25. I read the manuscript's τοῦ αὐτοῦ here instead of the conjecture τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ, as explained below.

26. I would conjecturally add εἰς τὸ; here after λόγος; ἦκει ὁ λόγος <εἰς τὸ> ἐκκαλῆσθαι τε καὶ ἐξηγεῖσθαι.

basements. Before its debasement, the term βασιλεύς was reserved for a philosopher-king or a morally supreme ruler—"king" in an ideal, Platonic-Aristotelian sense.<sup>27</sup> Ὑπατος meant "highest" or "best" before meaning "consul." Before their debasement, the terms *king* and *highest* or *best* were synonyms. This is what Themistius means when he says that "for so many years, [the words βασιλεύς and ὑπατος] allowed us to designate one and the same person in two ways" (τοῦτο δὴ τὸ ἀγαπητὸν ὅσα ἔτη ἢ διπλῇ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἐπωνυμία). C. G. Cobet did not understand this sentence and consequently corrupted the passage by emending the transmitted αὐτοῦ to ἐνιαυτοῦ, an emendation that was accepted in the Teubner edition but recently and rightly rejected by Maisano.<sup>28</sup>

What I propose is that the emperor was in the audience when Themistius was delivering *Oration* 33, and that, in the lost portion of the oration, Themistius praised the emperor as βασιλεύς and ὑπατος in the "original" sense of those words—that is, as an ideal king and morally highest or best. In addition, I would venture to suggest that the emperor was ὑπατος in the "debased" as well as the original sense of that word when this oration was delivered—that is, that he was holding the consulship at the time—and that Themistius noted the coincidence and irony.

Who was this emperor whom I am conjecturally putting in the audience? The clue is in Themistius's reference to certain coins that were withdrawn from circulation "a short time ago" (ἐναγχος). Many years ago, Otto Seeck contended that Themistius is referring here to a monetary event of the year 348 or 349.<sup>29</sup> All Themistian scholars followed him, and, so far as I know, no one reconsidered the matter until the 1970s and 1980s, when the numismatist Jean-Pierre Callu judged that the demonetization to which Themistius is referring occurred not in the late 340s, but in 354.<sup>30</sup> If Callu is correct, what we are

27. For Aristotle, note *Pol.* 3.13 [1284a3–b34], 3.17 [1288a15–29]. Does Themistius believe that there actually was a time in history when βασιλεύς was used only in its nondebased sense?

28. Cobet, "Annotationes criticae," 434; Maisano, *Discorsi*, ad loc. Maisano's text, however, has a misprint: διπλῆτος αὐτοῦ for διπλῇ τοῦ αὐτοῦ.

29. Seeck, *Briefe des Libanius*, 293n.

30. In "Denier et nummus (300–354)," 117–19; see also Callu and Barrandon, "Inflazione nel IV secolo," 1: 577, 579, 581, and Callu in "Analyses métalliques et inflation," 227–28. Callu notes that "depuis lors [1906] les numismates avaient oubliées" Seeck's comments on *Or.* 33 ("Denier et nummus," 117). Maisano, *Discorsi*, and Vanderspoel, *Themistius*, are unaware of Callu's discussions.

looking for is an emperor who was consul and in Constantinople soon after (ἐναγχοῦς) the demonetization of 354. Constantius appears to be our man. He was consul in 354, 356, 357, and 360, but during these years a presence in Constantinople is attested only for late 359 and early 360. *Oration* 33, then, should belong in the opening months of 360.<sup>31</sup>

In *Oration* 33, Themistius addresses a large audience of "dear Greeks" (364c) and "dear friends" (364d), but he is very frank with them. "[T]hese theaters," he says, "do not completely welcome the [philosophical] knowledge to which I am so passionately devoted" (364d). Themistius lectures his audience and asks them not to "become irritated or raise a clamor" (366d); otherwise, "I shall abandon the whole lot of you and take my leave" (367a). The laudatory words that I conjecture once stood in the body of *Oration* 33 were not merely a routine courtesy offered to the attendant emperor; they would also have dissociated him from the audience at large, suggesting that the emperor was not part of *hoi polloi* who are so frankly sermonized.

Modern sensibilities do not take readily to the rhetoric of praise. But, as John Vanderspoel reminds us, "Panegyrics were a fact of life in the fourth century and endemic."<sup>32</sup> Once we accept that fact, we are in a better position to appreciate the many uses to which the ancient orator could put the rhetoric of praise and the skill with which he could adapt it to a particular situation, its predictability and hyperbole notwithstanding.

31. For Constantius's attested whereabouts from 354 to 360, see Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 221–24. I am grateful for correspondence in 1995 and 1996 from J.-P. Callu and J. P. C. Kent on Them. Or. 33.367b–c. In a letter to me of February 12, 1996, Kent "strongly" favors the date 360 for Or. 33. Julian was consul in 363, but he had left Constantinople midway through the year 362, never to return there again (Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 83–85). Jovian was consul in 364, but he never reached Constantinople (Amm. Marc. 25.5–10; Zos. 3.30–35). It is probably not necessary to look to Valens, since we want a date close to 354. For consulships, see Bagnall et al., *Consuls of the Later Roman Empire*, 242–62.

32. Themistius, 218.

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## 10

## Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography *Constructing the Subject as Holy*

PATRICIA COX MILLER

### INTRODUCTION: RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY

[Eusebius] would shine out like a bright star, with a light like the sun's; such were the ease and charm that glittered in his words. (Eunapius, *VS* 474)<sup>1</sup>

[Abba Or] looked just like an angel . . . and his face was so radiant that the sight of him alone filled one with awe. (*HM* 2.1)<sup>2</sup>

Whether they drew upon the solar imagery of the celestial spheres of Neoplatonism or the ornithanthropic imagery of the beings populating the heavens of Christianity, the writers of the biographical collections that this chapter discusses—the *Vitae philosophorum et sophistarum* of Eunapius and the *Historia monachorum* by an anonymous author—were concerned to emphasize the (often literally) scintillating qualities of the subjects of their biographical sketches.<sup>3</sup> They did not analyze character so much as present it in striking images, using

1. Eunapius, *Vitae philosophorum et sophistarum*, ed. Boissonade, trans. Wright, in *Philostratus and Eunapius* (= *VS*). I have used Wright's translation but have made frequent, often extensive, revisions.

2. *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, ed. Festugière, trans. Russell, *Lives of the Desert Fathers* (= *HM*). I have made some revisions to Russell's translation.

3. I have borrowed the term *ornithanthropic*, which functions nicely to designate the imagistic quality of angels, from Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*, 172, who in her turn is quoting Victor Turner, *Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969; repr. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 253.

a "pictorial idiom" that John Matthews has described as "the peculiarly expressionistic manner" of the fourth century.<sup>4</sup> Part of Matthews's characterization of Ammianus Marcellinus's history is relevant to these collections as well:

In Ammianus, the portrayal of character as found in biography, whether erudite or philosophical, has been further subjected to an imagery of public display and theatre . . . consistent with an age in which "instant" visual and ceremonial communication have come increasingly to dominate the relations between government and governed, and in which the word of authority is increasingly dominating, relying more on the stirring of emotions than on rational exposition.<sup>5</sup>

The vividly visual and emotional aspects of the portrayal of character are evident, not only in the biographical sketches themselves, but also in the prologues of the two collections, in which the authors write about the process of biographical writing itself. Visually, Eunapius asks his readers to imagine the men about whom he writes as a "crop," using an organic metaphor suggestive of his view that these men represent the fruit of philosophical virtue (VS 454; 455).<sup>6</sup> The author of the *Historia monachorum* uses both arithmetic and civic images, explaining that his work is based on seeing the "boundless numbers" of men whose "way of life" (πολιτεία) he will describe (HM, pro. 10); here he is perhaps drawing on the convention that the monks had made the desert a city.<sup>7</sup> As we shall see, these authors also convey a sense of emotional involvement both with the process of writing and with the objects of their looking and, further, both use specifically religious images to describe what the biographical gaze sees.

These two aspects of the writing of biography, religion and emotion, were briefly noted by Arnaldo Momigliano as part of what he described as "the transformation of biography in the fourth century."<sup>8</sup> Religion, he argued, is connected with the transformation of the por-

trayal of character, character that was conceived earlier as "the experience of the interchange between individual ambitions and political circumstances" and was later replaced in fourth-century biographies by "mystical experiences and contacts with divine beings."<sup>9</sup> Although individual biographies establishing the "holiness" of particular men had been written prior to the fourth century—for example, Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* and Porphyry's *Lives of Plotinus and Pythagoras*<sup>10</sup>—Momigliano's point holds true for collective biographies in terms of a new interest in representing character in terms of religious values. The other aspect of transformation, emotion, enters biographical writing because "to be a creditable biographer of a holy man one had to claim close personal knowledge. There was a need of intimacy with a holy man. The biographer mediated the intimacy between saint and reader by asserting the intimacy between saint and biographer."<sup>11</sup>

Already in their prologues, these collections bear witness to the changed conditions in which biography was written, and these changes are evident in the ways in which these authors characterize the impetus, the motives, and the experience of biographical composing. On the topic of religion, the author of the *Historia monachorum*, for example, states succinctly, "I have truly seen the treasure of God hidden in human vessels," which, he goes on to say, "I did not want to keep secret, hiding something beneficial for the many" (HM, pro. 3). This author indicates explicitly that he has undertaken his writing not only to remember and honor his subjects, but also to edify those who are beginners in the kind of religious life that these subjects exemplify (HM, pro. 12). In large part, in fact, this author's collection is a record of his own edification, as he himself says; much of the narrative is presented as his face-to-face conversations with the men whose stories he would ultimately write (HM, pro. 2; 12).<sup>12</sup> The roles of reli-

4. Matthews, *Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 460.

5. Ibid., 460–61.

6. On the four "crops" of philosophers envisioned by Eunapius, see Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 36–38; on Eunapius's view of the virtue (ἀρετή) of these philosophers, see VS 453; 455.

7. For πολιτεία, a term for citizenship or daily life as a citizen (here, a citizen of the desert), see HM, pro. 2; 13. For the convention of monks making the desert a city, see Athanasius, VA 14 (PG 26: 865B); Jerome, Ep. 2.1 (PL 22: 331); Ep. 3.4.2 (PL 22: 334).

8. "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion," 1987, 176.

9. Ibid.

10. On Philostratus, see Francis, *Subversive Virtue*, 83–130; see also Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 17–44, on biographical paradigms of the holy man, and 102–33 on Porphyry.

11. Momigliano, "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion," 177.

12. The HM is presented as the record of travels undertaken by the author and his companions in c.e. 394 to visit ascetics living along the Nile River and its tributaries, from Lycopolis in upper Egypt to Nitria, some fifty miles south of Alexandria. Recent scholarship regards the journey as authentic; see Ward, "Introduction," *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 4–5, and Schultz-Flügel, *Tyrannius Rufinus Historia Monachorum*, 7–8.

gion and intimacy in the writing of biography are here very closely tied together.

Interestingly, in his epilogue this author gives dramatic flair to his revelatory project of providing "a testimony for the perfect" (*HM*, pro. 12). In the "expressionistic manner" noted by Matthews, he regales the reader with a detailed account of the ordeals that he and his companions endured as they observed the men who became the subjects of the author's collection: hunger and thirst, "marshy ground full of thorns and prickles," swamps, and floods are followed by robbers, a capsized boat, hailstorms, and finally by lunging crocodiles (*HM*, ep. 1–13)! Many of these brief stories of physical trials are glossed with passages from the Psalms and Job, whose cries for salvation—"Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink" (Ps. 69.14)—intensify the emotional tone of the narrative. Setting side by side these "great dangers" and the seeing of "wonderful sights," that is, the subjects of the collection themselves, the concluding passage of the epilogue functions to give the reader a retrospective frisson regarding the writing of biography (*HM*, ep. 14).

In his own way, Eunapius was no less emotional and, as will be seen, no less religious, in his evocation of his experience as a biographer. He confesses that, despite all the thought and care that he lavished on his project in an attempt to write a complete and definitive account, "I fell short of my ambition" (*VS* 455). Nevertheless, he interprets this experience of disappointment positively, and in an emotionally erotic language that is fittingly reminiscent of passages from Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*—I say "fittingly" reminiscent because of the virtually canonical, even "scriptural," status of Plato's dialogues in the Neoplatonic circles of the fourth century and because of the central role that *eros* played in the specifically Iamblican, religio-theurgic form of Neoplatonism to which Eunapius subscribed.<sup>13</sup> Eunapius remarks about the process of writing his biographical collection:

13. See Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 8, on the scriptural status of Plato's writings for fourth-century Platonists; see ch. 11 for a discussion of the role of *eros* in Neoplatonic philosophy; see also Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man," 34–35, for a discussion of Plato as a prototype of the "divine man" of late ancient paganism, whose philosophy was considered to be a mystery into which one could be initiated. For a discussion of Eunapius's life, as well as his Neoplatonism, see Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 1–19.

I have had the same experience as those who are madly and feverishly in love. For they, when they behold the beloved and the adored beauty of her visible countenance, bow their heads, too weak to fix their gaze on that which they desire, and dazzled by its rays. But if they see her sandal or chain or earring, they take heart from these and pour their souls into the sight and melt at the vision, since they can endure to see and love the symbols of beauty more easily than the beauty itself; thus too I have set out to write this narrative. (*VS* 455)

Using the simile of the lover, Eunapius describes his narrative enterprise in terms that are not only erotically emotional but also aesthetic; his biographical sketches are to be read as "symbols of beauty" that evoke beauty itself, the philosophical tradition to which his subjects belonged. The role of intimacy, as indicated by Momigliano, is relevant here as well, since Eunapius was himself a link in the "golden chain" of the Platonic philosophers whose lives he narrates, and he could trace his lineage through his teacher Chrysanthius back to the godlike Iamblichus and beyond to Porphyry, Plotinus, and ultimately, of course, to the divine Plato.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, like the author of the *Historia monachorum*, Eunapius was personally acquainted with many of the men who became the subjects of his biographical sketches. In some of these sketches, the warmth of personal connection, even devotion, that Eunapius's narratives convey illustrates well the intimacy between saint and biographer needed to mediate that same intimacy between saint and reader.<sup>15</sup>

The language of Eunapius's next statement brings out a further religious dimension of his project. Remarking that he has tried not to omit anything that he learned in the course of his research, he says, "I made obeisance at the doorways and gates of truth, and I have transmitted this to those in the future who either wish to hear or have

14. See Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man," 34, for the Neoplatonic adoption of the Homeric image of the golden chain (*Il.* 8.19), and see *VS* 457 for Eunapius's use of the image to describe Porphyry; for Eunapius's placement of himself in this chain, see *VS* 458 plus his remark at 461: "so wondrous a thing was the philosophy of Iamblichus, extending and reaching down from that time even to our own day."

15. See especially the warmth and love evident in Eunapius's description of his teacher Chrysanthius in *VS* 500–505; at 503, Eunapius says that he studied with Chrysanthius every afternoon: "in this period the teacher never grew weary of instructing his devoted admirer, while the task was like a holiday festival for him who received his teaching."



the power to be guided towards what is most beautiful" (VS 455). The verb that Eunapius has used to describe his action at the gates of truth, προσκυνήσαντα, is often used to designate ritual practices: falling down and worshipping the gods, or doing reverence in sacred places.<sup>16</sup> His language here reinforces the religious tone of the allusions to Plato in the previous passage and adds a ritual gloss to his understanding of his narrative endeavor. His readers are invited into the collection as though they were entering a sacred space.

The authors of both collections, then, have presented their work as biographers in emotionally charged rhetoric drawn from their respective religious traditions, and both have expressed the hope that readers will benefit from the lives that they depict. The fact that each has an intensely personal stake in the process of writing such a collection is already clear from their introductory remarks, and this personal engagement continues in the biographical sketches themselves. Before analyzing the specifics of character portrayal in these collections, however, I would like to turn again to the general theme, the transformation of culture as seen in Greek biographies of the fourth century, which has already been touched upon in the discussion of the new religious and emotive qualities of the two collections under discussion, and to ask specifically about changes in the writing of collective biographies.

#### COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY AS A LITERARY GENRE

In the imperial era, the major extant Greek collections of biographies prior to the fourth century are Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, Philostratus's *Lives of the Sophists*, and Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*.<sup>17</sup> When considering what makes these collections a cohesive

16. Eunapius uses this verb twelve times in the course of the *Vitae* (see Avotins and Avotins, *Index*, 204–5). In each instance but one (VS 461), the verb connotes religious reverence or worship of a philosopher, goddess, or emperor. For example, when an oracle's pronouncement appears miraculously inscribed on his hand, Aedesius "reveres" his hand (VS 464); the teaching of Sosipatra, whose words are regarded as oracles, is "revered," and after she returns from her mysterious initiation into secret religious rites by daimonic figures, she is "reverenced" by her father (VS 468; 469); the goddess Hekate is "revered" in her temple (VS 475); Oribasius is "worshipped like a god" among the barbarians (VS 499); a crowd "reveres" or "kisses" the feet of Prohaeresius and licks his breast "as though he were a statue of a god" (VS 489). These uses underscore the religious and ritualistic connotations of this verb.

17. Porphyry also wrote a history of philosophy, which concluded with Plato; however, only his *De vita Pythagorae* remains from this work.

group compared with the collections of the fourth century, it is useful to ask: what is a collection? One contemporary theorist, Susan Stewart, has suggested that "the collection marks the place where history is transformed into space," and this is so because the collection "seeks a form of self-enclosure" by adopting principles of organization and categorization that create "a new whole that is the context of the collection itself."<sup>18</sup> A collection is different from mere accumulation because "the collection is not constructed by its elements; rather, it comes to exist by means of its principle of organization."<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, there is a "play between identity and difference" in "the collection organized in accordance with qualities of the objects themselves. To group objects in a series because they are 'the same' is to simultaneously signify their difference. In the collection, the more the objects are similar, the more imperative it is that we make gestures to distinguish them."<sup>20</sup> Consider, for example, Samuel Pepys's principle of ordering his library:

[He] arranged and rearranged his library, [and] finally classified his books according to size. In double rows on the shelves the larger volumes were placed behind the smaller so that the lettering on all could be seen; and in order that the tops might be even with each other, this neat collector built wooden stilts where necessary and, placing those under the shorter books, gilded them to match the bindings! Subject and reference-convenience were secondary in this arrangement, except insofar as the sacrosanct diary was concerned, and this, which had been written in notebooks of varying size, Mr. Pepys, reverting to reason, had bound uniformly so that its parts might be kept together without disturbing the library's general arrangement-scheme.<sup>21</sup>

Here the principle of organization—size—preserves sameness; yet difference is emphasized as well, because the collector made sure that the titles that distinguished the books from one another could all be seen.

While not, perhaps, as obsessive as Pepys, the collectors of the imperial era also had principles of organization and categorization that display the authors' formal, rather than historical, interest in the lives

18. Stewart, *On Longing*, xii, 152–53.

19. *Ibid.*, 155.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

that they assembled in the space of their collections. Focusing for the moment on Plutarch, but with some attention to Diogenes Laertius and Philostratus as well, I would like to discuss the formal principles of these earlier collections in order to provide a basis for discerning what is distinctive in the collections of the fourth century.

The most obvious organizational principle of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* is parallelism itself, which is a principle of order that subordinates actual historical relationships to the more formal interest in the setting of comparable lives side by side. Plutarch's collection is a self-enclosed space for the comparative analysis of the character of notable political figures. His famous distinction between narrative history and biography is consonant with the formalism of his project; since he is interested in character, what he will offer is the telling detail that reveals "the signs of soul" more readily than grand actions on the stage of world history (*Alexander* 1.2).<sup>22</sup> In the next passage, his comparison of his selective method with that of the portrait painter reinforces this formal view of his own task, to endow with form or fashion into a pattern (*Alexander* 1.3).<sup>23</sup>

The focus in the *Parallel Lives* on a type of man, as well as the use of the strategy of parallels, suggests an interest in sameness, but in fact Plutarch is just as interested in difference. A good example is the opening of the parallel biographies of Demosthenes and Cicero, where Plutarch lists the many ways in which the lives of the two men were genuinely parallel and remarks, "If there should be a competition between nature and chance, as between artists, it would be difficult to decide whether the one made the men more alike in their characters, or the other in the circumstances of their lives" (*Demosthenes* 3.3–4). The comparison of the two men that concludes the two biographies, however, belies the apparent mimetic artistry of nature and chance and shows the two to have been different indeed (*Demosthenes and Cicero* 1–5).

In his treatise *De mulierum virtutibus*, Plutarch wrote what one recent interpreter has called "a kind of programme for the parallel lives."<sup>24</sup> There he remarks: "In fact, there is no better way of learning

the similarity and difference of male and female virtue than by putting lives beside lives and deeds beside deeds, just as if they were works of art. The virtues take on certain differences—peculiar colors, so to speak—because of the underlying habits, bodily constitution, food and way of life" (243 B-D).<sup>25</sup> This is suggestive of the impetus of the comparative strategy of the *Parallel Lives*, in which Plutarch works by comparison and contrast to reveal the "peculiar color" that virtues (and sometimes vices) take in each parallelism.<sup>26</sup> The function of the pairs is to underscore difference, a point that will become important when we turn to consider fourth-century collections.

Collecting different examples of virtue was important to Plutarch because his biographical project was an overtly moral one; the *Lives* were to function as ethical guides for his readers, and indeed for himself, as he says, "using history like a mirror, and somehow improving and moulding my own life in imitation of their virtues" (*Aemilius Paulus* 1.1).<sup>27</sup> His interest in types did not block his interest in the telling detail, because specificity was crucial to a complex understanding of virtue and vice. Further, despite what some have seen as the static quality of his treatment of character, a recent study has argued persuasively that in some of the *Lives* Plutarch developed a more nuanced understanding of character, "a middle ground of noble but not pure virtue" that fell "between crass vice and the pure philosophical virtue," and it is certainly the case that τύχη, fortune or chance, was allowed a role in many of his explorations of character.<sup>28</sup> Such allowances for the possibility of change mark another facet of Plutarch's interest in difference and will also be an important factor in tracking transformations in the writing of biographical collections in the imperial period.

The formal aspect of Plutarch's collection, then, can be imagined as a self-enclosed space in which a series of parallel lives provides the framework for a play of similarities and differences. By contrast, the principles by which Diogenes Laertius's collective biography is or-

25. Trans. *ibid.*, 156.

26. See the discussion in *ibid.*, 156–57. Plutarch's use, again, of an artistic simile to describe the basic principle that underlies his collection is an apt illustration of Stewart's point that "the collection marks the place where history is transformed into space"—here, the "space" alluded to is that of the artist's canvas.

27. Trans. Pelling, "Plutarch's Adaptation," 143.

28. Brenk, *In Mist Appareled*, 176–81; see also Russell, "On Reading Plutarch's *Lives*," 81–86.

22. See also *Galba* 2.5, *Fabius Maximus* 16.6, and the discussion by Pelling, "Plutarch's Adaptation," 142–43.

23. The verb that Plutarch uses to describe his portrayal of the lives of his subjects by means of signs is εἰδοποιέω.

24. Stadter, "Plutarch's Comparison of Pericles and Fabius Maximus," 156.

ganized are overtly spatial and linear. The *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* uses categorization by geography in its division of the origin and development of Greek philosophy into two major schools, one Ionian and one Italian (*Vit.* 1.13; 8.1).<sup>29</sup> Each of these spatial divisions is further subdivided in terms of successions of teachers and pupils; in other words, this collection is dependent upon a formal principle of linearity in its construction of a διαδοχή that allows the reader to plot philosophical relationships through time.

A recent characterization of Diogenes Laertius's work—that he produced “a gallery of memorable philosophers”<sup>30</sup>—is apt in this context, since the self-enclosed space of his collection is like an art gallery with two main wings, each of which has rooms filled with portraits arranged according to intellectual affiliation. Thus within the overall structure of differentiation, there is a principle that supports sameness, and this is further underscored by the fact that many of the individual biographies follow a standard format: an account of the philosopher's ancestry; his education, training, and travels; his founding of a school; his character, mannerisms, temperament, and habits, usually illustrated with anecdotes and pithy sayings; important events of his life; description of his death; details of chronology; works and doctrines; documents like letters; and addenda.<sup>31</sup>

However, even though there are formal structures of organization within the major division of the collection that emphasize sameness, Diogenes Laertius was as interested in difference as Plutarch. The fact that his collection focuses on a type, the philosopher, and even that “types within the type” can be discerned in terms of lines of philosophical filiation from teacher to student, did not prevent Diogenes from presenting a collection in which each sage had “his [own] brand of wit and wisdom.”<sup>32</sup> In fact, Diogenes' interest in the kind of detail that makes a life distinct shows itself in the wealth of anecdotes and apothegms that not only fill out most of the biographies in his collection but also overshadow the doxographical sections.<sup>33</sup> His col-

29. There is also a third group composed of “sporadics” like Heraclitus who belonged to no specific school; see *Vit.* 8.91.

30. Momigliano, “Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion,” 172.

31. This schema is adapted from Dillon and Hershbell, *Iamblichus: On the Pythagorean Way of Life*, 11–12; it is a summary of the findings of Delatte, ed. and comm., *La vie de Pythagore de Diogène Laërce*, 54–63.

32. Momigliano, “Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion,” 173.

33. See Mejer, *Diogenes Laertius and His Hellenistic Background*, 3–4; 91–92.

lection is a good example of the premise that, “in the collection, the more the objects are similar, the more imperative it is that we make gestures to distinguish them.”<sup>34</sup> Compared with the numbing repetitiveness of the doxographies and lists of works, his colorful characterizations have a sparkle that no typology could dim.

Turning to Philostratus, one encounters a collection devoted to yet another type of man, the sophist, and yet another formal principle of organization, temporality. Philostratus's work is based on a distinction between an “ancient sophistic” founded in the fifth century B.C.E. by Gorgias and concerned with philosophical themes, and a “second sophistic” founded by Gorgias's younger contemporary Aeschines and concerned with historical themes (*VSoph.* 1.481). His real interest, however, lay not so much in exploring the difference between these two kinds of rhetoric as in establishing an historical pedigree for the sophists of his own era—hence his insistence that the Second Sophistic was “second” and not “new” (*VSoph.* 1.481).<sup>35</sup> Despite this introductory interest in rooting the present in a tradition, Philostratus does not in fact find real historical continuity in the rhetorical movement that he wishes to discuss; between the time of the putative founder, Aeschines, and the sophist Nicetas in the first century (a gulf of almost four centuries), only three sophists are named, and these are dismissed as having had “no skill either in invention or in the expression of their ideas” (*VSoph.* 1.511). As Momigliano remarked, “Philostratus is unable to give real predecessors to his contemporary heroes.”<sup>36</sup> This aspect of Philostratus's collection coheres with the theoretical view that “the collection replaces origin with classification, thereby making temporality a spatial and material phenomenon.”<sup>37</sup> Collections have a tendency to become autonomous worlds.

Contrasted with Diogenes Laertius, who depicts “a world of the past which can still appear meaningful and coherent,” the world Philostratus describes is “a world of the present which is all show and no substance.”<sup>38</sup> What Philostratus creates in his collection is a world of attention that celebrates in encyclopedic form the intellectual movement of the second century, which he named “the Second

34. Stewart, *On Longing*, 155.

35. For discussion, see Bowersock, *Greek Sophists*, 8–9.

36. “Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion,” 174.

37. Stewart, *On Longing*, 153.

38. Momigliano, “Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion,” 174.

Sophistic" and of which he was a member. He did not himself invent this movement so much as create a literary space in which its most prominent members could be assembled and some of their main achievements narrated.<sup>39</sup>

In Philostratus's collection, each biography has a "sameness" based on the individuals' shared profession. Playing on the quotation above, "show" is the "substance" of each, and Philostratus's repetitious commentary on each sophist's rhetorical style and charm produces a certain tedium in the reading that sets up an expectation of "more of the same" as one moves from biography to biography. However, Philostratus has taken care to introduce difference into his biographies as well. In terms of formal composition, "no two *Lives* show the same method of treatment, a variety that may have been designed."<sup>40</sup> While the failure to be consistent in compositional style and presentation might seem "exasperating" to a modern reader,<sup>41</sup> this formal kind of variety is matched by the way in which Philostratus uses anecdotes and especially quotations of conversations and pithy sayings and retorts. These function to embed the individual sophists in a personalized context of social and political interaction; here too, as in the collections of Plutarch and Diogenes Laertius, there is a play between sameness and a sense of difference, the latter conveyed by the sort of gossipy detail that Philostratus clearly relished.<sup>42</sup> He was not interested in analyzing character or making moral judgments, but he *was* eager to show that his sophists were "characters"; hence his interest in the temperament, the quirks, and the habits of the "personalities" who gave rhetorical performances, and in the technical proficiencies and deficiencies that distinguished one performer from another.

#### COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY IN THE LATE FOURTH CENTURY

It should be clear by now that "to ask which principles of organization are used in articulating the collection is to begin to discern what

39. See Bowersock, *Greek Sophists*, 10, for a discussion of modern scholars' vindication of Philostratus's view that the Second Sophistic was a significant movement.

40. Wright, "Introduction" to *VS*, xiii.

41. *Ibid.*

42. See Bowersock, *Greek Sophists*, 15: "His information came to him directly, either from his own teachers or from others who had known the great sophists of the second century. . . . This is reporting at first hand."

the collection is about."<sup>43</sup> Further, when the principle of organization generates objects that are "the same"—whether they are philosophers, sophists, or politicians—there is a simultaneous drive to show how they are "different." How do these qualities of the collective biographies written in the imperial Roman era prior to the fourth century compare with the collections of the fourth century?

An intriguing angle on one answer to this question emerges in a passage from the prologue of Gregory of Tours's *Vita Patrum* (late sixth century). Ruminating on the title of his collection, Gregory says,

Some ask whether we ought to say "Life" of the saints or "Lives." Aulus Gellius, however, and many other philosophers prefer to say "Lives." For the authority, Pliny, in the third book of his *Art of Grammar*, states: "The ancients spoke of 'Lives' but the grammarians do not think that the word 'life' has a plural." Therefore, it is plainly better to say "Life" of the Fathers than "Lives," because, although there is a diversity of merits and miracles, nevertheless one life of the body nurtures all men in the world. (*PL* 71.1010)<sup>44</sup>

With his conviction that the collection exemplifies a "life" rather than "lives," Gregory has in a single stroke both defined hagiography and demonstrated its difference from the earlier collections considered thus far. If the fathers share a single life, it is because the subjectivity of holiness is the focus of the biographer, for whom the "diversity" of the particularities of their existences is only important insofar as it serves the ideal of sameness.<sup>45</sup> Further, the center of the personality is no longer human but divine; thus comparison of individuals is not only pointless but impossible. There is no longer an interplay between type and individual or between sameness and difference; rather, any real sense of difference between individuals evaporates to the extent that each one exemplifies the subjectivity that is the heart of the collection's interest.

43. Stewart, *On Longing*, 154.

44. Trans. Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*, 5–6.

45. *Subjectivity* is a term used in a variety of contemporary critical theories to describe a "self" not as an autonomous source of meaning but rather as a construct, the product of systems of cultural convention. The discourses of a culture not only set limits to how a self may be understood but also provide models or paradigms that are used to classify or represent that culture's understanding(s) of "selfhood." In this chapter, *subjectivity* does not connote the personal attitudes, moods, and opinions of an individual; rather, it refers specifically to religious and philosophical constructions of the self that present idealizations of human identity.

Gregory's thought about the appropriateness of designating a group of biographies as a single "life" is a real insight into the dynamic operative in the writing of hagiography. I argue that this "hagiographical impulse"—that is, the change in focus from "lives" to "life"—guided the writing of collective biography in the fourth century and accounts for the distinctive qualities of these later collections when compared with their predecessors.

By the late 390s, when both the *Historia monachorum* and Eunapius's *Vitae* were written,<sup>46</sup> the composition of individual biographies of men and women who were considered holy—whether ἅγιος in Christian terms or θεῖος in pagan terms<sup>47</sup>—was well under way. Averil Cameron has coined a memorable phrase to describe the seeming explosion of competing exemplary figures in this period with her suggestion that "Christian and Neoplatonic rivalries could seem to be expressing themselves in a war of biography."<sup>48</sup> If it was a war, however, it was one in which each "side" may have influenced the other; the *Historia monachorum* was the first attempt (that we know of) by a Christian author writing in Greek to produce collective biography, while, as several scholars have suggested, Eunapius's *Vitae* may have been intentionally composed as a pagan hagiographical counterpart to individual biographies of Christian holy men.<sup>49</sup> What we shall see, in any case, is that the hagiographical impulses of these two collections are indicative of a struggle for the power to define the authentic human being.

A preliminary issue involves intent: what are the overt indications in these collections that a model of human identity that is different from another is being constructed? First, Eunapius. Care has to be taken when evaluating his view of Christianity. As fragments extant from his *History* show, he was capable of moral critiques of pagans

and Christians alike, a fairness in historical judgment stemming from his main themes, traceable to Plutarch, that "an evil nature inevitably surfaces and that good men are corrupted by circumstance."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, in the *Vitae* his philosophers, all pagan but one and all having lived under Christian emperors, are shown as men of *paideia* whose traditionally based wisdom is a reason for persecution but also for imperial recognition.<sup>51</sup>

What is not in question, however, is Eunapius's dislike of monks, especially those associated with Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria at the time of the destruction of the Serapeum in c.e. 391. For a pagan like Eunapius, the Serapeum was so sacred a place that it had infused the whole city of Alexandria with religion (VS 471). For here was a temple where the devoted worshipper could see the lips of the statue of Serapis illuminated by a sunbeam, so that, as Rufinus reported, "it seemed to the onlooking people that Serapis was being greeted with a kiss by the Sun" (HE 11.23).<sup>52</sup> Eunapius calls the monks whom he associates with the destruction of the Serapeum "the polluted ones" and compares Theophilus with the mythic Eurymedon, commander of the Giants who made war on the gods (VS 472).<sup>53</sup> He is even more scornful of the monks who came to live in the desecrated sacred places of Alexandria and Canopus:

Then they brought into the holy places the so-called monks, men in appearance [ἀνθρώπους μὲν κατὰ τὸ εἶδος] but swine in their way of life, and they both permitted and themselves performed openly thousands of unspeakable indignities, thinking it pious, however, to show contempt for things divine. For at that time whoever wore a black cloak and wished to behave disgracefully in public had the power of a tyrant, to such a height of virtue had mankind come. (VS 472)<sup>54</sup>

Eunapius criticizes not only what he perceives the monks to have done to pagan religion and holy places but also one aspect of the

46. For the *HM*, the *terminus post quem* is provided by the mention of the death of the emperor Theodosius I (in c.e. 395) in 1.64; see Schulz-Flügel, *Tyrannius Rufinus Historia Monachorum*, 17, 46–47, where the (largely uncertain) date of Rufinus's translation of the *HM*—possibly before c.e. 399 or between c.e. 401–405—gives a *terminus ante quem* for the Greek text. See Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 9, for the dating of Eunapius's *VS* to the fall or winter of c.e. 399.

47. See Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 16–17, for a discussion of the pagan distinction between ἅγιος (used of gods and sacred places) and θεῖος (used of people); Christians used θεῖος to designate the saintliness of persons as well as gods.

48. Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 145.

49. See Alan Cameron, "Paganism and Literature," 14; Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order*, 68; Momigliano, "Pagan and Christian Historiography," 81.

50. See Sacks, "Meaning of Eunapius' History," 63.

51. For examples of men of *paideia* sought after by emperors, see VS 465–66 (the philosopher Eustathius) and VS 478 (Maximus and Priscus); for persecution, see VS 478–81 (Maximus) and 498 (Oribasius); for discussion, see Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 118–28.

52. Trans. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization*, 1: 132.

53. For the destruction of the Serapeum as well as the contemporaneous attacks on the temenos of Isis at Canopus, see *ibid.*, 1: 22–23; 129–30; Trombley's reference to "Theophilus' liquidation gangs" (p. 23) is an apt characterization of Eunapius's view.

54. Trans. Blockley, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, 2: 81.

monks' own religious practice, the veneration of martyrs. According to Eunapius, martyrs were not only false gods, they were dead men who had once been criminals and slaves:

For they [the monks] collected the bones and skulls of criminals who had been put to death for numerous crimes, men whom the law courts of the city had condemned to punishment, made them out to be gods, haunted their sepulchres, and thought that they became better by defiling themselves at their graves. "Martyrs," the dead men were called. (VS 472)

The sharpness of Eunapius's characterization of the cult of martyrs is understandable in the context of two particular Christian practices. The first, which Eunapius refers to later in the passage above as the transformation of temples into tombs, was the demolition or conversion of pagan temples to churches or martyria (VS 473).<sup>55</sup> The second was the demotion of pagan gods, including such major divinities as Artemis of Ephesus, Aphrodite of Gaza, and Serapis of Alexandria, to the status of demons.<sup>56</sup> As the Christian historian Theodoret observed about the activities of the monk Thalaleios at a temple in Gabala, the "ancestral folly" of pagan worship was exposed as Thalaleios "abolished the temenos of demons and raised a great precinct to the splendidly victorious martyrs, substituting the divine dead for the falsely named gods" (HR 28.5).<sup>57</sup> As far as Eunapius was concerned, this perspective did not constitute the kind of "beholding with the intellect" that he was concerned to represent, but was, rather, the result of looking with "deceptive eyes of the body" (VS 473).

Eunapius concludes his negative profile of the monks with a reference to the sorrow that "men who have intelligence" (τοῖς νοῦν ἔχουσι) felt over the destruction of the temples (VS 473). This invocation of νοῦς, an important feature of Neoplatonic psychology and metaphysics, as characteristic of the type of person that Eunapius admires provides a telling contrast with the monks, who are human only in appearance.<sup>58</sup> For men who have νοῦς are men of *paideia* under-

55. See VS 471, where Eunapius discusses the destruction of the temple of Serapis as the fulfillment of an oracular pronouncement by one of his philosophers, Antoninus. On the Christian practice of converting temples to their own use, see Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 1: 108–47.

56. See Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 1: 99–108.

57. Trans. *ibid.*, 1: 107.

58. On the role of νοῦς in Iamblichean Neoplatonism, see Shaw, *Theurgy*, 70–72; 88–97; 147–48.

stood as Hellenic culture and spirituality, and they embody an ideal that the monks have flouted in their attacks on pagan holy places and in the anti-civic nature of their worship of "criminals and slaves."<sup>59</sup> This passage of the *Vitae* offers the most explicit indication of Eunapius's focus on contrasting types of subjectivity.

A sense of differing models of human subjectivity can be discerned in the *Historia monachorum* as well. Indeed, its tendency to show disregard for the traditional culture and learning that gave to pagan men of *paideia* a "shared imaginative landscape" is evident in several of its anecdotes.<sup>60</sup> Rather than claiming the ideal type of the philosopher for Christianity as Theodoret did when he asserted that the monks were better philosophers than the philosophers (*Cure* 12.19–37, esp. 26), the author of the *Historia monachorum* adopts a more combative tone. For example, the eminent Evagrius is introduced as a "wise and eloquent man" (ἄνδρα σοφὸν καὶ λόγιον) who "often went down to Alexandria and refuted the philosophers of the Hellenes [τῶν Ἑλλήνων τοὺς φιλοσόφους] in disputations" (*HM* 20.15). In this passage, the "ancient magic of Greek words," the λόγοι so central to the rhetorical culture of late ancient learning,<sup>61</sup> is appropriated for a Christian monk, who turns his eloquence against a faceless group, "the philosophers." In this brief anecdote, *paideia* seems to be both affirmed and denied, yet the affirmation of secular wisdom in fact works to hollow out its traditional cultural significance.

This somewhat ambivalent attitude to learning appears again in a story about another monk, Theon, of whom the *Historia monachorum* reports that "by grace [χάριτι] the man had learned three languages and was able to read in Greek, Latin and Coptic" (*HM* 6.3).<sup>62</sup> On the one hand, Theon's learning is regarded as a charism; but on the other,

59. On Eunapius's view of Hellenism as a "spiritual force," see Penella, *Greek Philosophers*, 144–45; Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man," 37. Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 9–12, discusses the use of the term *Hellenic* to mean "pagan." Brown characterizes "the sharpness of the challenge . . . summed up in the persons of the monks" in terms of their subversion of "a cultural and political monopoly": "[t]he monks could utter the *gros mots* that broke the spell of *paideia*" (*Power and Persuasion*, 72–73).

60. For the characterization of *paideia* as a "shared imaginative landscape," see Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 41.

61. See *ibid.*, 30 (whence the quotation) and 50 for a discussion of the importance of λόγοι. See also p. 73: "It was a commonplace of Christian polemic that the church had brought to the Roman world a wisdom and a moral code that had previously been the fragile acquisition of, at best, a few great minds."

62. On the contrast between worldly education and "the new *paideia* of desert ascetics," see Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 56–61.

his manner of learning "by grace" sweeps away both "the master-pupil relationship that had ensured the continuity and the characteristics of the 'Civilization of *Paideia*'" and "the patient re-creation, in every generation, of the 'collective memory'" upon which the rhetorical culture of late ancient pagans depended.<sup>63</sup> And in any case, what really attracted the author about Theon was not his learning but his ascetic practices, his miracles, and his companionship with wild animals—not, perhaps, the kind of activities for which multilingual erudition would be needed. One is reminded of another Christian man of *paideia*, the monk Arsenius, who had once been tutor to the sons of the emperor Theodosius I. It was reported of him that "one day he consulted an old Egyptian monk about his own thoughts. Someone noticed this and said to him, 'Abba Arsenius, how is it that you with such a good Latin and Greek education, ask this peasant about your thoughts?' He replied, 'I have indeed been taught Latin and Greek, but I do not know even the alphabet of this peasant'" (AP, Arsenius 6).<sup>64</sup>

Pagans are present in the *Historia monachorum* primarily by their absence. The few scattered references to pagans that the text does include all begin by defining them negatively; they function as the "other" against which monks can be shown to possess superior qualities. In contradistinction to the monks, pagans are never given names, even when individual pagans appear as actors in an anecdote. When pagans appear in groups, for example, they are presented in one case in a negative religious light as participants in a "demonic cult of idolatry" who parade around the countryside with their idols in a state of madness; in another case, they are described in social terms as lower-class "riff-raff" whose only purpose in life seems to be to taunt a monk (HM 8.24–26; 19.2). This is a typological strategy similar to that of Eunapius's religious and social references to (unnamed) monks and contributes to the discourse of division that underlies the interest of both collections in recommending a particular form of subjectivity, in part at the expense of another form.

63. The quotations are from Brown, "Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," 9–10, and *Power and Persuasion*, 40. On the importance of circles and institutions of education and scholarship in paganism and particularly in Neoplatonism, see Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man," 38–48.

64. For discussion, see Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 73; Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 58.

When pagans appear as individuals in the *Historia monachorum*'s anecdotes, they fare no better: one is a flute-player notorious for indecent behavior; another steals vegetables; yet another, characterized as "the champion of the pagans," is described as "fierce and savage" (δεινός τις καὶ ἄγριος) (HM 19.3; 10.34; 8.36). The state of being ἄγριος, savage or wild like an animal, is repeated in another anecdote, this time of a group of pagans (HM 19.9). The use of this adjective with its bestial and uncultivated connotations expresses well the "other," the negative type of human being against which monks, "a real army of angels" at the opposite end of the human spectrum, are implicitly being defined (HM 8.19).

But there is more to these cameo appearances of pagans than this. If the kind of ascetic discourse in which the *Historia monachorum* participated depended on "strategies of negation and exclusion" in order to define itself against both human and demonic "others," it was also a discourse of inclusion,<sup>65</sup> and here the strategy of the *Historia monachorum* differs from that of Eunapius's *Vitae*. For in each instance in which pagans appear in this text, they are all converted to Christianity through the intervention of a monk (HM 8.29, 37; 10.33–34; 19.3–5, 8–9). In fact, in one of the stories of mass conversion reported in the *Historia monachorum*, the author states that "many of them [i.e., the former pagans] entered monasteries and are still living there today" (HM 8.29). The pagans are not only converted but become monks themselves. In terms of constructing forms of subjectivity, the *Historia monachorum* appears as the more aggressive of the two collections, in that it not only presents a model of human identity but also shows how that model transforms its own "other" into itself.<sup>66</sup>

#### REPETITION AND OTHER LITERARY TECHNIQUES IN COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY

Indications of an awareness of competing models of human identity can thus be found in both of the collective biographies under consideration here. In spite of this, however, I would refrain from charac-

65. For a discussion of this way of viewing ascetic discourse, see Averil Cameron, "Ascetic Closure and the End of Antiquity," 157. On the importance of demonology in the ascetic definition of the self, see Valantasis, "Daemons."

66. See Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 16 and passim, for an overall argument regarding the absorption of the secular into the sacred in late ancient Christianity, which Markus connects specifically with the "spread of an ascetic mentality."

terizing these works as overtly polemical in their overall intent and would prefer to place them in the context of the following comment by Averil Cameron: "What was taking place in late antiquity in intellectual and imaginative terms was surely a competitive process of system construction, a persistent impulse towards definition."<sup>67</sup> From the "key methodologies" that she finds at work in this process—metaphor, imagination, narrative, and categorization—I would choose two, metaphor and narrative, as particularly relevant to the "system construction" that I see as basic to the collective biographies studied here, and I would like to develop them in a way that will be relevant to an investigation of the means by which each collection presents its own distinctive vision of subjectivity.

In the earlier tradition of writing collective biographies, as I have suggested, formal principles of organization allowed for a play of sameness and difference. Subjects were classified according to types—politicians, sophists, philosophers—but within the types there was room for exploration of differences in character, talent, intellectual affiliation, and so on. In the late fourth-century collections of Eunapius and the author of the *Historia monachorum*, however, such a play of sameness and difference is no longer a distinguishing mark of the formal properties of the collections. This is so because the type, whether philosopher or monk, has been assimilated to an ideal of human identity itself. The individual lives that make up the collection have been so overwhelmed by the signifying power of this new sense of what constitutes a "type" that the former interest in real difference fades.

In other words, the formal principle that organizes these collections is a principle of repetition that has altered the "feel" of what a collection is and that guides the way in which individuals are represented. The impulse to repeat and so reinforce the features of this identity underlies the formal compositional technique of these collections. As Umberto Eco remarked about James Bond thrillers, the pleasure of these texts is their sameness.<sup>68</sup> Further, redundancy is reassurance; part of the delight for the reader who experiences the repetitions of such texts is the fact that they make familiar the qualities

67. "Ascetic Closure," 156.

68. Eco, "James Bond," 96, quoted in Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*, 7–8.

of what is exemplary. If the same biographical profile is repeated often enough, differences in detail are no longer distracting.

When the interest of a collection is in depicting human identity by means of its exemplars, the result is a parade of metaphors each of which tells essentially the same "story."<sup>69</sup> That is, each part of the whole that is the collection functions as a metaphor of the whole. A contemporary literary theorist, W. J. T. Mitchell, has recently coined a term, *hyper-icon*, that captures the specifically *pictorial* function of such metaphors and in addition indicates their function vis-à-vis the religious ideologies that are the center of our two collection's interest. Hyper-icons—like Plato's cave—are pictorial images in which theories of knowledge are condensed. In particular, they play a central role in figurations of theories of the self and human identity. As Mitchell remarks, "In their strongest forms, [hyper-icons] don't merely serve as illustrations to theory; they picture theory."<sup>70</sup>

From this perspective, the individual "lives" that make up the *Vitae sophistarum* and the *Historia monachorum* can be seen as a series of icons that function as anthropological images, repeatedly picturing understandings of human identity in such a way as to bring out the religious vision of the collection as a whole. This view of the role of the individual units of such collections also helps to reestablish the integrity of the formal principle of composition of hagiographical collections, repetition itself. When viewed as a literary strategy in the service of religious anthropology, "la teinte monochrome," as Hippolyte Delehayé called hagiographical repetitiousness, takes on a more interesting hue.<sup>71</sup>

69. On redundancy, see Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*, 75. She utilizes Edmund Leach's concept of redundancy, which he derived from information theory, "where a high level of redundancy makes it easy to correct errors introduced by noise (interference)." Leach used this theory to explain the repetitive nature of myth, but his comments are applicable in the present context as well: "Now in the mind of the believer, myth does indeed convey messages which are the Word of God. To such a man the redundancy of myth is a very reassuring fact. Any particular myth in isolation is like a coded message badly snarled up with noisy interference. Even the most confident devotee might feel a little uncertain as to what precisely is being said. But, as a result of redundancy, the believer can feel that, even when the details vary, each alternative version of a myth confirms his understanding and reinforces the essential meaning of all the others" (*Genesis as Myth*, 9).

70. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 49. (For clarity, I have hyphenated the term, whereas Mitchell does not.)

71. Delehayé, *Passions des martyrs*, repr. 1966, 223.



Turning now to specific analyses of these texts, and focusing overall on the presence of the "hagiographical impulse" in each collection, I shall discuss the *Historia monachorum* first, and then Eunapius's *Vitae sophistarum*. The analyses that follow deal primarily with metaphor and narrative technique and are organized around two theses: first, that the formal aim of the two collections in representing subjectivity correlates with the similar way in which each handles lives as metaphors, and, second, that the different kinds of religiosity that underlie the exemplary subjectivity of each collection can explain the narrative techniques that each uses.

#### ICONS OF THE ANGELIC LIFE IN THE *HISTORIA MONACHORUM*

Students of the *Historia monachorum* and allied collections such as Palladius's *Lausiac History* and Theodoret's *Historia religiosa* have frequently noted that the individual units of the collections are biographical sketches that often omit conventional biographical data like ancestry, place of birth and death, main achievements, and so on.<sup>72</sup> In literary terms, they have been described as "a free-ranging style of cameo portraits" in which "a single incident would often suffice for the author's purpose."<sup>73</sup> Insufficient differentiation among the subjects of the individual sketches of these collections has also been noted; for example, R. M. Price remarks about Theodoret's collection that it is "magnificent as a series of stories, but feeble as a series of portraits . . . to the point where most of the stories, accidental details aside, would equally fit most of his holy men."<sup>74</sup>

Another perspective different from the modern view of the "insufficient differentiation" in these collections is offered by Theodoret himself and can provide a useful gloss on the perspective of the *Historia monachorum*. In the prologue to his collection, Theodoret offers what is in effect a defense of selectivity as compared to completeness in biographical writing: "We shall narrate only a little of the life and actions of each man, and shall represent the character of the whole

72. See, e.g., Rubenson, *Letters of Saint Antony* (1995), 177 (on the HM); Canivet, *Monachisme syrien*, 69; Harvey, *Asceticism and Society*, 34–37; Miller, "Desert Asceticism," 143–44.

73. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society*, 34–35.

74. Price, tr. and intro., *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: A History of the Monks of Syria*, xv.

life through these few indicators" (ἀλλ' ὀλίγα τῶν ἐκάστῳ βεβιωμένων ἢ πεπραγμένων διηγησάμενοι, καὶ διὰ τῶν ὀλίγων τοῦ παντός βίου τὸν χαρακτῆρα παραδείξαντες) (HR, pro. 8). The part thus stands in a metaphorical relationship with the whole. This is a significant statement, because it means that, just as each individual biographical sketch of the collection functions as a metaphor of the whole, so also each anecdote within the individual sketches functions equally metaphorically to signify the life of a given biographical subject. Even the pretense of completeness is no longer necessary.

Unlike Plutarch's careful explanation of his selective method, which leaves the grand stage of history and focuses instead on the personal gestures that reveal the "signs of the soul" that make an individual unique,<sup>75</sup> Theodoret's method aims at displaying the single human identity that underlies his selections. Thus the different "graces" that are represented all have a single source in God. Appealing to 1 Corinthians 12.8–10, Theodoret lists these graces—words of wisdom, the ability to heal, working miracles, prophecy—a list that amounts to a description of the repertory of ascetic deeds that are repeatedly ascribed to various subjects in his and like-minded collections (HR, pro. 8). What looks to the modern eye to be poor portraiture is from the ancient perspective a testimony to the repeated instantiation of what Theodoret says that he is recording: "a life . . . that has emulated the way of life in heaven; we sketch the forms of invisible souls" (HR, pro. 3).

This distinction between "life" and "way of life" is found also in the *Historia monachorum* and is a crucial feature of this collection's use of individual biographical sketches as metaphors for the form of human subjectivity to which the text as a whole is devoted.<sup>76</sup> The concept of human identity that underlies the *Historia monachorum* implies a life lived in ever closer approximation to the paradigm of Christ himself. This is what the text describes as "the angelic life" (ἀγγελικὸν βίον); in the prologue, it is formulated as follows: "I saw there [in Egypt] many fathers living the angelic life as they continued to advance in the imitation of our Savior God" (HM, pro. 5). Powerful claims are made on behalf of the men who exemplify this form of

75. See n. 22 above.

76. The same distinction can also be found in the VA, whose title in Greek, Βίος καὶ πολιτεία, reflects the distinction made in the prologue, where the author states that he is giving an account of Antony's "way of life" (πολιτεία); see VA, pro. 3 (PG 26: 837A).

subjectivity: "[T]hrough them the world is sustained and through them also human life [ἡ ἀνθρώπινη ζωή] is sustained and honored by God" (HM, pro. 9).

What the text actually describes, however, is not the βίος of these men but rather their "way of life," their πολιτεία, a term that is used consistently throughout the text to designate what is conveyed by the anecdotes that form each individual unit of the collection. The "way of life" is the form in which paradigmatic "life" itself is expressed in human terms. In other words, what I have called "the hagiographical impulse" transforms conventional biographical presentation by substituting for it qualities of a "way of life" that signify the underlying conception of human identity itself. It is in this sense that the individual units are biographical. A full account is no longer needed when the characteristics of a particular individual's life are metaphors that signify a subjectivity whose paradigm is divine.

#### NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN THE *HISTORIA MONACHORUM*

What these icons of the angelic life essentially do is to picture the presence of Christ as "the root of the self" in the form of biographical anecdotes.<sup>77</sup> The narrative techniques of the *Historia monachorum* are consonant with this vision of subjectivity. For example, although the text as a whole is presented as the record of an intensely personal journey undertaken by the author, who emphasizes repeatedly his seeing and looking at the monks,<sup>78</sup> there is no physical description of these men. Instead, the reader's gaze is directed away from characteristics that would mark the monks as "personalities" and so detract from their function as signifiers of a subjectivity that they all share and that represents the highest religious potential of human nature. Thus, for example, when the author of the *Historia monachorum* writes about Ammon and his group of monks in the Thebaid, what he

77. The quotation is from Brown, "Saint as Exemplar," 13; see also Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 144–46 for a discussion of "the fact that Christian mythology was built on biography" (p. 145) and p. 123 for the characterization of fourth-century hagiography as "the continual reworking and reenactment of idealized Christian biography, the pattern of Christian truth in action."

78. See, e.g., HM, pro. 3, 5, 7, 10; 8.48; 8.50; 10.1; ep. 1. On the function of the gaze in ascetic reporting, see Miller, "Desert Asceticism," 137–43.

chooses to report is that they "eat with their faces veiled" (HM 3.1). No features that would distinguish these men as individual characters are given. Most striking are the well-known descriptions of individual monks as looking like angels with radiant faces or being like angels in serene stillness (HM 2.1; 4.1; 6.1; 8.19). The dazzle that substitutes a divine luminosity in the place of human features in the faces of these men is part of the pictorial idiom that this collection uses as it presents human lives as metaphors of the angelic life.

Another feature of the narrative strategy of the *Historia monachorum* that guides the reader's interest toward the "life" that is signified by the biographical subjects' "way of life" is its sparseness of form in narrative historical terms. The subjects are not situated in detailed sociocultural contexts. Additionally, there is little chronology apart from such vague markers as "not long before," "once," "earlier," "afterwards," and so on. Instead, the biographical sketches present their exemplary figures as though they were in an extended "middle" that takes the form of anecdotes that follow one another rapidly in a staccato-like fashion with little or no expository prose to weave them together as a continuous narrative. This disjointed style, however, creates a sense of restless motion and activity that is matched by the contents of the anecdotes themselves.

The anecdotes in this collection are primarily stories of action. As the author explains in his prologue, such "acts of power" (δυνάμεις) are directly connected to the relationship of the monks' way of life with Christ. He favors stories about performances of miracles of many kinds: exorcisms, healing the sick, defeating threatening animals, discerning the secret thoughts of others, raising the dead, walking on water—the list is long. He also favors stories in which the monks are pictured as the recipients of miraculous acts: they are fed by angels or otherwise receive miraculous food, they are granted instant knowledge of languages and the Scriptures, and in one exceptional case a monk is even taken for a visit to Paradise.<sup>79</sup> The other major form of anecdote features monks speaking in the first person, either telling stories about other monks (e.g., HM 8.14; 9.5–11; 10.3–12.16), or in

79. The index to Russell and Ward, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, provides a convenient categorization of the various types of miracles and charisms present in the collection. For the visit to Paradise, see HM 21.5–12 (Macarius).

active conversation with others (including the author and his companions) as teachers (e.g., *HM* 1.22–62; 2.7–10; 8.16–23; 16.1–2).

The sense of movement conveyed by the way in which the anecdotes are assembled is thus matched by the contents of the anecdotes, whether the activities pictured by them are performative, as in the case of miracles, or dialogical, as in the case of conversations and teachings conveyed by direct quotation. The formal and material aspects of this collection's insistence on action deserve to be underscored because they are indicative of the understanding of religious anthropology that underlies the vision of the text.

The ideal of the angelic life is rooted in a form of spirituality that is heavily dependent on forward motion. Recall the author's statement that "living the angelic life" entails advancing steadily or continually going forward in the imitation of Christ (*HM*, pro. 5). As Robert Kirschner has noted, "the Christian holy man conforms to a highly specific model" because "his vocation is pre-eminently an imitation of Christ."<sup>80</sup> And, while I agree with his estimation that "[d]own to every detail of his being, the holy man is a divine revelation,"<sup>81</sup> it is important to remember that the form of subjectivity to which the *Historia monachorum* is devoted is dependent on a mimetic dynamic in which "the ascetic is constantly progressing but never arrives."<sup>82</sup> As Abba Poemen said about Abba Pior, "[E]very day he made a new beginning" (*AP*, Poemen 85).<sup>83</sup>

The ascetic is in constant motion, because he is called to ever more perfect imitation of Christ; but he never arrives, because a claim of perfect imitation would constitute a blasphemous claim to be fully divine. Thus to the statement of one interpreter that ascetics like those in the *Historia monachorum* cherished the conviction "that they were

80. Kirschner, "Vocation of Holiness in Late Antiquity," 112.

81. *Ibid.*, 120.

82. Harpham, *Ascetic Imperative*, 43.

83. A particularly poignant story that makes the same point is told about the deathbed scene of Abba Sisoës: "The old men asked [Abba Sisoës], 'With whom are you speaking, Father?' He said, 'Look, the angels are coming to fetch me, and I am begging them to let me do a little penance.' The old man said to him, 'You have no need to do penance, Father.' But the old man [Sisoës] said to them, 'Truly, I do not think I have even made a beginning yet'" (*AP*, Sisoës 14). The same point is made by *HM* in a more discursive form in the teaching passages; see, e.g., *HM* 1.22–28; 8.14–15. See also Athanasius, *VA* 16–18, for yet another example of the topos of "a new beginning every day." (I thank Tomas Hägg for this last reference.)

recovering in their life in the desert a small taste of paradise," I would add, "with the emphasis on *small*."<sup>84</sup> Geoffrey Harpham has given a concise explanation of this phenomenon:

The illusion that one had reached an ideal or perfect identification with Christ the Word was the most notorious and insidious of temptations, slamming the door closed at the very moment when one had proven oneself worthy of entering. Hence asceticism, the discipline of the essential self, is always defined as a quest for a goal that cannot and must not be reached, a quest with a sharp caveat: "seek but do not find."<sup>85</sup>

This theological perspective on the necessity of forward motion suggests that the subjectivity that lies at the heart of the *Historia monachorum* is a form of religious anthropology that views the subject as an "emergent person" or as an "evolving subject" in motion toward a divine paradigm.<sup>86</sup> In other words, both in its literary form and in its contents, the *Historia monachorum* is a collection whose view of human identity is based on a religious anthropology that features an ethic of perfectibility. Overall, then, this text is a specifically ascetic witness to the "persistent impulse towards definition in late antiquity,"<sup>87</sup> and its use of metaphor and narrative technique are well suited to its version of human identity.

#### ICONS OF NEOPLATONIC HOLINESS IN EUNAPIUS'S *VITAE SOPHISTARUM*

If the "embodied angels" of the *Historia monachorum* are maintained "in a fluid human state"<sup>88</sup> in both literary and ideological terms, what of the philosophers in Eunapius's collection? To move from the "old men" of the Egyptian desert to the cultivated philosophical circles of the eastern Mediterranean would seem to entail a major leap of imagination, and, in terms of differing social and political contexts, it does. Yet to the extent that *paideia*, one of the terms that

84. Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 232.

85. Harpham, *Ascetic Imperative*, 43.

86. I owe these phrases to Valantasis, "Constructions of Power," 801.

87. Averil Cameron, "Ascetic Closure," 156.

88. This phrase is from Valantasis, "Daemons," 53.

marked the identity of Eunapius's philosophers, had taken on religious overtones, expressing a "metaphysical exaltation of cultural values . . . invested with a kind of sacred radiance that gave it a special dignity of a genuinely religious kind,"<sup>89</sup> this move is not so radical. Philosophers no less than monks could be subjected to the metaphorizing process that forms part of the hagiographical impulse of biographical writing in the fourth century. Certainly, Eunapius had no doubt that "to master *paideia* was to embark upon the pagan vocation of holiness."<sup>90</sup>

Just prior to the extended simile of the biographer as lover (referred to at the beginning of this essay), in which Eunapius suggests that his work should be read as a record of "symbols of beauty," he refers to his literary predecessors (VS 454–455). Sotion and Porphyry wrote about early philosophers, and Philostratus filled in the gap between them by writing the lives of sophists. In the same sentence in which he refers to Philostratus, Eunapius states that "no one has recorded accurately the lives of the philosophers" (VS 454), seeming to imply that he is carrying on the project of Philostratus, although not for the same time period.<sup>91</sup> Contemporary scholarship has indeed viewed Eunapius's collection as "a conscious continuation of Philostratus."<sup>92</sup>

In my view, however, Eunapius's work is a very different kind of collection from that of Philostratus. In the first place, the title of his collection, "lives of *philosophers* and *sophists*," indicates that something has happened to the typological structure of his putative model. As Momigliano pointed out, "it was no longer possible to evaluate a Sophist simply in terms of his technical abilities. . . . The very category of Sophist has lost precise significance."<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, there is

89. Marrou, *History of Education in Antiquity*, 101.

90. Kirschner, "Vocation of Holiness," 106.

91. See Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 36: "[Eunapius] seems to imply that there have been four major philosophical crops; the philosophers down to the time of Plato, the philosophers from that time down to Sotion's time, the philosophers from Sotion's time down to Porphyry's time, and the philosophers from Porphyry on (i.e., those who are discussed in his own *Lives*)."

92. Momigliano, "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion," 175; Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 17, has a brief but undeveloped reference to "Eunapius' model Philostratus." The same assumption is implicit in the volume of the Loeb Classical Library that includes the work of both Philostratus and Eunapius under the common title, *Lives of the Sophists*.

93. "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion," 175.

only a feeble attempt by Eunapius to be inclusive in his assembly of the lives of the "crop" of philosophers and sophists with whom he is dealing.<sup>94</sup> He was not celebrating a movement characterized by a biographical type that admits of variation and difference as was Philostratus; rather, Eunapius constructed a "purified genealogy" that was designed to emphasize the divinity that lay at the center of the personalities of the subjects he assembles.<sup>95</sup> I think Eunapius's simile of the philosopher as symbol of beauty should be taken seriously as an indication of "the impulse towards definition" that defines his work as a collector. As in the *Historia monachorum*, the type has been assimilated to an ideal of human identity that is religious.

Specifically, the hagiographical impulse that guides Eunapius's collective biography and underlies its principle of repetition is the "religio-theurgic *sophia*" of Neoplatonism associated with Iamblichus.<sup>96</sup> Eunapius begins his collection with brief biographical sketches of Iamblichus's two predecessors in the Neoplatonic lineage, Plotinus and Porphyry. While he notes that Porphyry's biography of Plotinus is so complete that no one could add to it, what he chooses to say on his own account is revealing: "Altars in honor of Plotinus are still warm, and his books are in the hands of educated men, more so than the dialogues of Plato" (VS 455). Later reference to the learned Plotinus as possessing a soul with heavenly qualities reinforces the essential concordance between *paideia* and the divine nature of the men who embody it that will dominate Eunapius's presentation of his subjects (VS 456: Πλωτῖνος τῷ τε τῆς ψυχῆς οὐρανίῳ . . .). The presentation of Porphyry that follows the note on Plotinus contains some biographical detail, but the main focus is on Porphyry's wisdom, especially his "godlike discourses" and the depth and range of his knowledge, and on his religious practices, especially his practice of theurgy, his reception of an oracle, and his casting out of a demon (VS 457).

These two sketches already begin to reveal the basis for the principle of repetition that characterizes the interest of the collection as a whole: it is the theurgical view of the highest goal of human nature, its transformation to divine status. For the theurgist, every human

94. See Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 134–41, on "Themistius and other, missing persons."

95. For the idea of "purified genealogy," see Lim, *Public Disputation*, 60.

96. Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 50.

soul was the receptacle of the gods, and the goal of every soul was to join what was divine in itself to the divine cosmos of the gods.<sup>97</sup> Eunapius views his philosophers and sophists as exemplifying this transformational process. While he describes himself as the beneficiary of the theurgical lineage of Neoplatonic teachers, Eunapius does not discuss the tenets of theurgical philosophy in his collection. However, his frequent use of the term θεῖος and cognates to describe his philosophers and especially his use of θαῦμα and cognates (over fifty times) to describe the wondrous qualities of these figures and the marvel that they provoke in others is certainly suggestive of an essentially theurgical view of their attainments.<sup>98</sup>

If the first two sketches give a sense for the kind of portrayal that is to follow, it is the third biographical sketch, that of Iamblichus, that provides the catalyst for the rest of the collection, and it does so in two ways. First, it implicitly sets up the careful crafting of lineage (which in part entails a strategy of exclusion) that guides the narrative interest of the collection, and, second, it exemplifies the way in which Eunapius utilizes anecdotes in order to portray his subjects as icons that function as anthropological images.

To the first point: as Robert Penella has pointed out, when Eunapius presents Iamblichus as the next in the Neoplatonic lineage after Porphyry, he “does not explicitly contrast the religious-philosophical orientations of the two philosophers.”<sup>99</sup> There is no mention, for example, of Iamblichus’s pointed critiques of Porphyry in the *De mysteriis*, particularly regarding what he viewed as Porphyry’s misunderstanding of theurgy.<sup>100</sup> Instead, “he conveys a sense of the philosophical continuity that stretches from Plotinus through Porphyry to Iamblichus and beyond.”<sup>101</sup> Where he does find difference between the two—a difference in literary style (VS 458)—it seems incidental to the overall *Tendenz* of the collection, which is to portray “the many roots and springs of philosophy” that had their

97. See Shaw, *Theurgy*, 5, 84–85, 110–11. See also Lim, *Public Disputation*, 59: “Increasingly [in the fourth century], a true philosopher was someone whose primary claim to consideration was divine inspiration.” See also Fowden, “Pagan Holy Man,” 37–38.

98. See VS 461 and 500 for Eunapius’s place in the lineage he describes; for his use of θεῖος, θαῦμα, and cognates, see Avotins and Avotins, *Index*, 110–12.

99. *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 46.

100. See Shaw, *Theurgy*, 84–85 and *passim*.

101. Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 46–47.

source in the teaching of Iamblichus (VS 461); these are the philosophers that form the “purified genealogy” referred to earlier.

The philosophers who interest Eunapius and receive lengthy anecdotal treatment are all in some way tied to Iamblichus, mostly by direct academic filiation: Aedesius, Sopater, and Eustathius were students of Iamblichus, and Maximus, Priscus, and Chrysanthius were students of Aedesius. Sosipatra and her son Antoninus are included in this group by association as the wife and son of Eustathius. Eunapius thus presents a kind of “family tree” of Neoplatonists, and their interconnectedness is not only materially but also formally indicated by the narrative technique of Eunapius’s approach to biography, in which stories about many of these figures are interpolated into the biographical sketches of others. This is, however, a family tree that has been carefully pruned. As Robert Penella has persuasively demonstrated, there are “missing persons,” like the eminent Themistius and Eusebius of Myndus, and they are missing because they did not adhere to the specifically theurgical brand of Neoplatonism associated with Iamblichus and his followers.<sup>102</sup> In the present context, these omissions constitute a strategy of exclusion that underlies the principle of repetition that I see at work in Eunapius’s collection.

A similar attempt to establish affiliation with Iamblichean Neoplatonism appears to have guided the way in which Eunapius presents the sophists in his collection. These men were not philosophers, but Eunapius is careful to associate them somehow with the Iamblichean tradition. Ten sophists are included, but only two receive significant narrative treatment. First is Julian of Cappadocia. In the first sentence of his sketch of Julian, Eunapius is quick to inform the reader that he “flourished in the time of Aedesius,” one of the main figures in the transmission of theurgical Neoplatonism (VS 482). Furthermore, Julian is described in Neoplatonic terms as one who was able to comprehend “true beauty”; the numbers of his students and their devotion to him, described in religious terms (σεβάζόμενοι), is reminiscent of the description of Iamblichus’s relationship with his students; and his house is described as resembling “a holy temple having the scent of Hermes and the Muses” (VS 482–83).

Apart from these descriptive passages that serve to connect this

102. *Ibid.*, 134–39.

sophist with the religious identity that guides the collection, the one anecdote that Eunapius tells about Julian, concerning legal action brought by a rival group of students against Julian's students, serves not so much to characterize Julian as to provide a vehicle for the eloquence of Prohaeresius, pupil of Julian and Eunapius's teacher, who reduces the crowd to "a mystic silence," a clear religious reference (VS 484). Prohaeresius is the figure accorded the longest biographical sketch in the whole collection. Significantly, he was Christian, but Eunapius's only reference to this fact is very oblique: referring to the emperor Julian's ban on Christians holding chairs of education, Eunapius reports that "Prohaeresius was shut out of the field of *paideia* because he *seemed* [ἐδόκει] to be a Christian" (VS 493).<sup>103</sup>

Otherwise, Prohaeresius is described in pagan terms. He is compared with a famous historical figure from the classical past (Peisistratus) and with figures from Greek mythology (Geryon and Hermes); he is said to have a "daimon" and to be under the guidance of divine providence; he consults the hierophant of Eleusis (VS 488; 487; 486; 489; 493). Overall, Eunapius's view is clear: this man "surpassed the ordinary human type" and deserved the title, "the most divine Prohaeresius" (ὁ δὲ θεϊότατος Προαιρέσιος) (VS 492; 486). The force of the hagiographical impulse is perhaps clearest in this portrait of Prohaeresius, whom Eunapius presents as an icon of Hellenic holiness. The collection's formal interest in ideology has overshadowed the depiction of difference to such an extent that Prohaeresius's Christian affiliation is virtually erased as the repetition of one narrative detail after another connects the identity of Prohaeresius with the form of subjectivity that the whole collection delineates. Even in the presence of actual difference, sameness prevails.

The two major sophists, then, are made to conform to the ideal that organizes the collection. The very brief treatment of the remaining eight sophists is part of what I referred to earlier as the "feeble inclusiveness" of Eunapius's collection, yet even these eight are brought into the interconnected field of the figures that "bubble forth" from Iamblichus and that Eunapius regards as exemplary. All of them are in some way connected with the Neoplatonic circle that is the focus

of narrative attention, whether by association with the emperor Julian (the Neoplatonic hero of Eunapius's *History*), by association with Prohaeresius as rivals, or as a relative of one of the philosophical theurgists.<sup>104</sup> Of the remaining figures treated by Eunapius, the rhetorically minded physicians whose presentation he describes as a "digression," only one really captures Eunapius's narrative interest, and this is Oribasius, associated with the emperor Julian as his physician and described by Eunapius as a man whose medical art in imitation of the god Asclepius led him "as far as it is possible for a human being to progress towards the imitation of the divine"; indeed, "among the barbarians he was worshipped like a God" (VS 498). Even the "digressions" fall under the spell of the hagiographical impulse, which shows itself in these biographies in repeated indications of the replacement of character with divinity as the core of personality.

#### NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN EUNAPIUS'S *VITAE SOPHISTARUM*

If the biographical sketch of Iamblichus is the catalyst for the construction of this "purified genealogy" in which philosophical sameness provides the basis for inclusion in the collection, the anecdotal treatment of Iamblichus's "life" can be seen as paradigmatic of Eunapius's narrative technique in the entire collection. As an examination of the anecdotes about Iamblichus will make clear, Eunapius is no more "complete" in narrative biographical terms than the *Historia monachorum*. In fact, in his *History*, which was itself influenced by the genre of biography, Eunapius rejects the use of chronology as a technique of narrative organization, because it induces the writer to include too many extraneous details that "spoil the nourishing and beneficial part of the feast of history." "This is not the way to play the flute," he remarks, and continues: "What do dates contribute to the wisdom of Socrates or the acuity of Themistocles? Were they great

103. On Julian's ban, see Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 84–85; see also the full discussion of Neoplatonic conceptions of *paideia* which formed the context of Julian's own ideas in Athanassiadi, *Julian*, (1992), 121–60.

104. Libanius and Himerius are both associated with the emperor Julian, and Acacius is presented as a rival of Libanius (VS 494–495; 497); Epiphanius, Diophantes, Sopolis, and Parnasius are presented as rivals of Prohaeresius; additionally, Epiphanius and Diophantes were also students of Julian the Sophist, as was Prohaeresius (VS 493–494); Nymphidianus was the brother of the famous Maximus (VS 497). For discussion, see Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 94–117.

men only during the summer? Rather, both alike exhibited and preserved their virtues and their skills repeatedly and continually."<sup>105</sup>

This rejection of dates as distractions from a proper view of character, based on viewing qualities that are "repeatedly and continually" evident, reads like an articulation of the "literary program" that underlies Eunapius's collective biography, in that it relies heavily not on chronology but on anecdotes that repeatedly instantiate an ideal of human identity.

The biographical sketch of Iamblichus is dominated by three anecdotes, all of them strikingly visual. In each anecdote, Iamblichus is placed in the company of his group of students, who function essentially as an audience for what Eunapius calls "the forceful demonstrations" of Iamblichus's "divine nature" (VS 458). Even the descriptive narrative passage that introduces the first of these anecdotes is indicative of the aura of the sacred that infuses the figure of Iamblichus. Eunapius says that "as they drank their wine he used to charm those present by his conversation and filled them as with nectar" (VS 458). Here Iamblichus is pictured as dispensing the drink of the gods to his students. This picture of Iamblichus is an appropriate introduction to the first anecdote, in which the students tell Iamblichus about a rumour they have heard: "A rumour has reached us through your slaves that when you pray to the gods you soar aloft from the earth more than ten cubits; that your body and your garments change to a beautiful golden hue; and presently when your prayer is ended your body becomes as it was before you prayed, and then you come down to earth and associate with us" (VS 458). Here the levitating, golden-hued Iamblichus is presented as a god, as though in demonstration of the theurgical view that "the theurgist was simultaneously man and god; he became an icon and *sunthema* [divine symbol or "signature"] in the same way as other pure receptacles."<sup>106</sup> As Iamblichus himself wrote, one aspect of theurgy can be described as "taking the shape of the gods" (*De myst.* 184.8).

105. The quotations from Eunapius's *History* are all from fr. 1, in Blockley, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians*, II.9. See Sacks, "Meaning of Eunapius' History," 57–59, for a view of Eunapius's history as "a moralistic pattern filled with simplistic characterization" (p. 59). See also Alan Cameron, "Paganism and Literature," 11: he suggests that Eunapius's "contempt for chronology" was a negative comment on the Christian chronicles being written in his time.

106. Shaw, *Theurgy*, 51.

Although he reports that Iamblichus laughed off this rumor as untrue, Eunapius himself does not appear to reject it by the very fact of narrating it, and in any case he goes on to report two "forceful demonstrations" of this figure's divine nature. In the first, Iamblichus's superhuman power of perception is shown when he discerns that a corpse has recently been carried on the path that he and his followers were taking; this capacity for spiritual discernment is noted again later in the collection, when Iamblichus is said to have the ability to "see with the mind" (τῷ νῷ θεωρεῖν) (VS 473).

The third anecdote leaves no doubt that what is being narrated is religious power in iconic form. In this anecdote, Iamblichus and his group are at two hot springs, one named "Eros" and the other, "Anteros." Iamblichus puts his hand in the first spring, utters brief formulaic words, and brings forth a boy with golden hair. The students, understandably "struck with amazement," follow their teacher to the next spring, where the same performance produces another boy, this one with dark hair. These boys, personifications of Eros and Anteros, cling to Iamblichus "as though he were their father" until Iamblichus restores them to the springs (VS 459). This anecdote depicts theurgy in action, with its fundamental aim of eliciting what is divine in the human soul in order to unite it with its responsive counterpart in the divine world.<sup>107</sup> The portrayal of Iamblichus being "embraced," as it were, by the divine figures of Eros and Anteros witnesses to the process of theurgic νόσις understood as "the act of a god knowing itself through the activity and the medium of the soul."<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, since "Iamblichus maintained that noetic contacts with the gods were more erotic than intellectual," his calling forth of these two figures in particular seems philosophically appropriate.<sup>109</sup> If one recalls Eunapius's simile describing his own work as biographer as that of a lover, as well as his frequent invocation of νόσις as characteris-

107. *Ibid.*, 122–26.

108. *Ibid.*, 121.

109. *Ibid.* See Shaw's comment on this anecdote in Eunapius: "We need not concern ourselves about the veracity of this fabulous tale to appreciate its iconic truth. Perhaps no better image for the theurgist could be portrayed than this: Iamblichus himself, seated by an overflowing stream, invokes its *Eros* and having called it out, joins it—through his own body—to its responsive *Anteros*. All theurgy did the same: situated in the stream of generation, the theurgist invoked the *eros* of this stream to awaken the *anteros* hidden in his soul; in the hieratic moment of joining the divine to the divine the theurgist himself became a creator" (p. 126).

tic of his subjects, the theurgical orientation of his collection begins to come into focus.<sup>110</sup>

When compared with the way in which the *Historia monachorum* uses anecdotes to portray a subjectivity whose exemplars are “emergent persons,” Eunapius’s handling of anecdotes in the *Vitae sophistarum* tends to portray a subjectivity whose exemplars are “finished products.” I have emphasized the theurgical orientation of the biographical sketch of Iamblichus as paradigmatic of the whole collection, because Eunapius is fond of telling anecdotes in which ritual activities convey the divine status of his subjects, a status that is repeatedly invoked further by uses of the term θεῖος. He is also fond of indicating the oracular and prophetic qualities of his subjects. However, although Eunapius’s individual sketches are like those in the *Historia monachorum* in that they function as metaphors that repeatedly exemplify the subjectivity of holiness that Eunapius is presenting, there is nonetheless a difference between the two collections in terms of narrative structure. While the *Historia monachorum*, as we have seen, does not embed its anecdotes in discursive or descriptive passages, and does not give physical descriptions of its subjects, Eunapius’s *Vitae* does both, and I think this difference can be traced to the differing forms of religious subjectivity that underlie the two collections.

In discussing the features of Eunapius’s collection that make it distinctive when compared with the *Historia monachorum*, I shall concentrate on the philosophers and sophists to whom Eunapius devoted the most narrative “space,” since the very length of such portraits suggests that these were in Eunapius’s view exemplars par excellence. I shall deal briefly with Eunapius’s anecdotes, as well as some of his most pointed descriptions of his subjects’ divinity, and then with the way in which they are embedded in narrative. My interest lies in exploring the particular way in which Eunapius, like the author of the *Historia monachorum*, has revised the rules of representation in such a way that sameness, and not a play of sameness and difference, dominates his activity as a writer of collective biography.

Anecdotes devoted to ritual activities as well as statements about divinity are prominent in the sketches of Aedesius, Maximus, Chrysanthius, Sosipatra, and Antoninus. Often the anecdotes are

110. See Avotins and Avotins, *Index*, 156–57, for references to νοῦς and its cognates.

connected with oracles. Aedesius, for example, once prayed to an oracle and received its response in a dream-appearance of the god. Awakening and “spellbound with awe,” but unable to catch the precise words of the god, Aedesius discovered that the back of his left hand was covered with writing (VS 464). The divine words were inscribed on his body, surely a stunning ritual indication of what Eunapius later calls “the divine qualities of his soul” (VS 474).

Aedesius’s student Maximus is pictured as being himself an oracle: all who listened to him “acquiesced in what he said as though it came from the tripod of an oracle, such a charm sat on his lips” (VS 473). An accomplished theurgist, Maximus is described by Eunapius as possessed of a voice “such as one might have heard from Homer’s Athena or Apollo” (VS 473). The anecdote about his ritual activity, in which he invites a group to witness his animation of a statue of the goddess Hecate, making it smile and laugh and kindling the torches in her hands (VS 475), is clearly designed to evoke the atmosphere of the marvelous that surrounds such figures—and this in spite of the fact that later in his narrative Eunapius is critical of Maximus’s arrogance once he became a member of Julian’s court (VS 477). And, when he narrates the story of Maximus’s arrest and execution in connection with a political conspiracy, Eunapius notes that it was “just as though in the person of Maximus they were punishing some god” (VS 480).<sup>111</sup>

Eunapius presents his revered teacher Chrysanthius as having “equal perfection in every branch of every type of wisdom, and was an adept in every branch of divination. Hence one might have said of him that he rather saw than foretold future events, so accurately did he discern and comprehend everything, as though he dwelt with and were in the presence of the gods” (VS 500). Although he reports no anecdotes that picture Chrysanthius’s theurgical activity, he notes in two other passages his teacher’s devotion to divination and his “passionate absorption” in such ritual activity (VS 474; 500). He remarks further about his teacher that “his kinship and affinity with the gods

111. For discussion of the so-called “THEOD oracle plot” at Antioch in C.E. 371–72 in which Maximus was involved, as well as imperial legislation against sorcery, see Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 48–72; see also Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 68–74. Penella notes that “despite [Eunapius’s critique of] Maximus’s and Priscus’s blemishes, which serve to enhance Chrysanthius [Eunapius’s teacher], Eunapius’s representation of them is, in general, favorable and appreciative” (p. 71).



was so unceremonious and familiar that he had only to place the garland on his head and turn his gaze upwards to the sun, and immediately deliver oracles which, moreover, were always infallible and composed after the fairest models of divine inspiration" (VS 504).

Clairvoyance, prophecy, and oracular speech are also characteristic of Sosipatra, who is repeatedly described as a goddess. Presented in religious terms as having "bacchic and frenzied speech," she was taught, says Eunapius, by mysterious figures that her father believed to be "gods in the likeness of strangers" (VS 467–470). As Penella has noted, Sosipatra's son Antoninus carried on his mother's "religio-theurgic style," devoting himself to the "secret rites" of the gods in Canopus and acquiring fame for his prediction of the destruction of the Serapeum, which Eunapius describes as having gained "the force of an oracle" (VS 471).<sup>112</sup>

Anecdotes and other indications of theurgical activity and outright declarations of divinity such as these are embedded by Eunapius in discursive narrative passages that make reading his collection a different experience when compared with reading the *Historia monachorum*. There is no staccato-like movement in the *Vitae sophistarum*. Rather, Eunapius writes long descriptions of the grace, elegance, and charm of his subjects' speech and writing, as well as the effect that they have on their students. He emphasizes the heights of wisdom to which they have ascended, tellingly comparing three of these figures with Socrates.<sup>113</sup> He also provides some description of the political affairs in which some of his philosophers engaged; this is a feature of his text that functions to indicate the traditional role that philosophers filled in the exercise of power and conveys the sense of "old-world integrity" that Eunapius wants his reader to see in his subjects.<sup>114</sup>

These descriptive passages convey the status that his subjects hold as purveyors of *paideia* at its classical best. This kind of description is crucial to Eunapius's view of the essential alignment of *paideia* with Neoplatonism seen as a spiritual force. However, in compositional terms, the formal effect of these narrative passages is one of static por-

112. Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 59.

113. VS 462 (Sopater); 492 (Prohaeresius's threadbare cloak and practice of going barefoot echo Plato's picture of Socrates in the *Symposium* 220A–B); 501 (Chrysanthius characterized as "the Platonic Socrates come to life again").

114. On the relationship between *paideia* and power, see Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 35–70; for the quotation, see p. 67.

trayal, especially since the descriptions of erudition and eloquence are very general and repetitive.<sup>115</sup> Additionally, there is very little attention paid to technical aspects of philosophical or sophistic style as in Philostratus's collection, and there are very few of the long quotations from speeches that also mark the earlier collection. Eunapius has adopted a third-person style of narrative description, and this formal aspect of his collection coheres, I believe, with his tendency to present his figures as "finished," rather than as constantly in mimetic motion toward an ideal paradigm like the monks of the *Historia monachorum*.

This "finished" quality is also carried in Eunapius's physical descriptions of many of his philosophers and sophists as larger-than-life figures who have transcended the confines of mortal bodies. Mimesis of a personal paradigm of divinity played no role in Iamblichean Neoplatonism, since there was no "person" to imitate. The goal, rather, was "to take the shape of the gods," as Iamblichus wrote in his *De mysteriis* (184.8). Further, as Eunapius notes in his prologue, he is offering his biographical sketches "for those who have the power to be guided towards what is most beautiful" (VS 455). Each person must exercise his own δύνανται in order to achieve the transformation that theurgy aimed to effect. Also, even though Eunapius can write about the students of Iamblichus that they "hung on to him as though by an unbreakable chain" (VS 459), the master-pupil relationship as Eunapius presents it functions more to establish lineage than it does to establish the "intensity of face-to-face loyalty" that was basic to the personalized mimetic dynamic operative among the monks of the *Historia monachorum*.<sup>116</sup>

In the Iamblichean form of Neoplatonism, "the body-as-tomb, 'riveted to the soul by sense experience' (*Phaedrus* 83d), became the vehicle through which the soul found its proper limits, thereby 'saving itself' and 'becoming liberated while still in a body.'" <sup>117</sup> It is in this philosophical context that Eunapius's physical descriptions of

115. Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 32, notes briefly that "some of [Eunapius's] sketches are little more than static portrayals or notes"; my point here is different.

116. The quotation is from Brown, "Saint as Exemplar," 10. For discussions of monastic interest in personal relationships, especially of the master-disciple variety, see Gould, *Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 17, 27, 37–46, 63–69, and Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church*, 19–32.

117. Shaw, *Theurgy*, 26; Shaw is quoting from Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 41.10.

his subjects assume their significance for his overall project. Like the luminous Iamblichus, whose body during prayer is different from a mortal body, several of Eunapius's subjects are described as being similarly godlike in their persons. So, for example, Alypius is described as being very short; but, as Eunapius notes, "even the body that he seemed to have was really all soul and intelligence; to such a degree did the corruptible element in him fail to increase, since it was absorbed into his diviner nature" (VS 460). We have already seen the hand of Aedesius covered with divine writing. There is also the case of Antoninus, who "seemed to be human"; indeed, "he made rapid progress towards affinity with the divine, despised his body, freed himself from its pleasures, and embraced a wisdom that was hidden from the crowd" (VS 471). Chrysanthius, too, "was so completely emancipated from human weaknesses that, although a mortal, he was all soul . . . his body was so light in its movements that it would take a genuine poet to describe to what a height it rose aloft" (VS 504).

The "anatomy of visible holiness" that Eunapius employs is elsewhere evident, for example in his physiognomical description of Maximus's "winged eyes" that reveal "the agile impulses of his soul" (VS 473).<sup>118</sup> Perhaps most astonishing of all of Eunapius's physical descriptions, however, is his portrayal of his teacher Prohaeresius not only as larger-than-life—"he seemed to stand nine feet tall"—but as a statue (VS 487). At one point, an audience that has heard Prohaeresius speak "licked his breast as though it were the statue of some god" (VS 490).<sup>119</sup> Literally larger than life, Prohaeresius is best understood as a statue, and he is so far "beyond the measure of the human" that, as a statue, he is ritually adored by his audience (VS 492).

All of these descriptive passages point toward an understanding of religious subjectivity that is fundamentally aesthetic. Eunapius's subjects are like finished works of art. And, given the "aesthetic aspect of *paideia*," which is revealed in Eunapius's collection by his references to beauty of speech and physical form as well as by his understanding of his subjects as "symbols of beauty," this is not surpris-

118. For the phrase, "anatomy of visible holiness," as well as a discussion of Eunapius's use of physiognomy, see Lim, *Public Disputation*, 58–59.

119. See also VS 492: a crowd "marvelled at his physical beauty and great stature, while they gazed up at him with an effort as though to behold some statue or colossus."

ing.<sup>120</sup> In his study of the marble shield portraits from late ancient Aphrodisias, which may have decorated the philosophical school there, R. R. R. Smith describes one of these sculptures, a portrayal of an old philosopher. "This portrait," he observes, "was designed to represent an inspired, visionary philosopher, a man of the spirit, an impassioned thinker of divine thoughts." He describes the expression of the portrait as one of "an overriding intense, beatific spirituality."<sup>121</sup> This is a "panegyric in marble"<sup>122</sup> that is the counterpart in stone to what I would describe as the "literary statues" presented by Eunapius. His anecdotes of transformative theurgical activity, his ascriptions of divine nature, the narrative evocations of *paideia*, plus his physical descriptions all work to depict his figures as aesthetic religious icons who have achieved the transformation that the monks of the *Historia monachorum* pursue but necessarily never reach.

## CONCLUSION

What I hope to have demonstrated in this essay is one aspect of the "translation" of Greek culture across temporal boundaries in late antiquity. In the literary world of the early imperial era, collective biography was a well-established genre. Focusing on the formal properties of these collections in order to provide a basis for comparison with collections written in the fourth century, the period in which Christianity emerged as a major player in late ancient culture, I have discerned not only a "translation" of culture in terms of the enduring appeal of a literary genre but also a "transformation" of culture in terms of the changes that this literary genre underwent.

Briefly put, this change can be described as a shift from biography to hagiography. Implicit in the perspective that has guided my discussion of Eunapius's *Vitae philosophorum et sophistarum* and the *Historia monachorum* is the view that religion played a fundamental role in this shift. Initially piqued by the largely unexamined but nonetheless confident assumption by several modern interpreters that Eu-

120. See Athanassiadi, *Julian* (1992), 189–91; 206–7 for a discussion of the "aesthetic aspect of *paideia*." For Eunapius's many references to beauty, see Avotins and Avotins, *Index*, 121.

121. Smith, "Late Roman Philosopher Portraits," 145.

122. *Ibid.*

napius was writing "pagan hagiography," I decided that a comparison of Eunapius's work with a "real" hagiography written in the same period might produce interesting results. Comparison of the two fourth-century texts both with each other and with their literary predecessors provided the key to the position that has guided this discussion: that is, that a fundamentally religious view of subjectivity accounts not only for the changes in what constitutes a collection per se but also for the differences in the rhetoric of each collection, rhetoric being understood here in the loose sense of "characteristic means or ways of expression."<sup>123</sup>

The most fundamental transformation to which Eunapius's *Vitae* and the *Historia monachorum* testify as collections is the loss of the concept of "type" as a meaningful category for the comparative evaluation of individual persons; but this "loss" is also a gain. By assimilating the type to religious convictions concerning human identity itself and at its best, Eunapius and the author of the *Historia monachorum* have provided eloquent testimonies to the powerful—and colorful—role that religious anthropology played in reshaping the ways in which human life was imagined in late antiquity.

123. Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 13.

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## 11

## The Syriac Life of Rabbula and Syrian Hellenism

G. W. BOWERSOCK

In 1865 J. J. Overbeck published for the first time the text of a manuscript in the British Museum that is the only surviving witness to a hagiographic account of the life and achievements of a fifth-century bishop of Edessa, Rabbula.<sup>1</sup> The manuscript, written in Syriac on parchment, displays an estrangelo hand that is generally agreed to date from the sixth century. Since Rabbula died in 435 or 436, this manuscript is relatively close to the bishop's own time, and the lack of any contamination from Theodoret's biographies of Syrian ascetics, the Φιλόθεος ιστορία produced in 444/5, has led some to believe that the work was written very soon after Rabbula's death. Whatever the precise date of composition, this life is remarkably free from the legendary accretions that mark the lines about Rabbula in the Greek biography of Alexander Akoimētos, who is there credited with converting the future bishop of Edessa from the paganism in which he grew up. The life of Alexander also survives in a single manuscript but from the tenth or eleventh century, and its late date suggests that its substance may be a confection put together well after the Syriac life of Rabbula.<sup>2</sup> The Syriac life makes no mention at all of Alexander.

The Syriac text has been reprinted a few times directly from Overbeck's transcription, and it appears in an abridged form in the chrestomathy that concludes Carl Brockelmann's still indispensable *Syrische Grammatik*. It has attracted remarkably little attention from histori-

1. Overbeck, ed., *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae Episcopi Edesseni Balaei Aliorumque opera selecta*, 159–221. I am grateful to the participants in the Bergen colloquium, and in particular to the two editors of this volume, for comments on this chapter. Christopher Jones, who was among those present in Bergen, has done me the great service of commenting helpfully on several drafts, both before and after the colloquium.

2. De Stoop, ed., *Vie d'Alexandre l'Acémète* (PO 6, fasc. 5).

ans of late antiquity, possibly because it has been translated into no modern language since Gustav Bickell's unsatisfactory rendering into German in 1874.<sup>3</sup> Yet the narrative of Rabbula's career down to his appointment as bishop in Edessa abounds in detailed references to the Hellenic culture of Syria in the latter part of the fourth century and the early years of the fifth. It affords glimpses into the society of Chalcis (Qennishrîn), where Rabbula was born, and into the asceticism of the desert. It takes the reader to Beroea (Aleppo) and to Cyrrhus, as well as to Jerusalem and Ba'albek. It is possible that the author was drawing on personal recollection of Rabbula, but he must also have had access to written accounts, including pagan ones. An identification of Christ as "the god of the Christians" (well after he has already been mentioned several times earlier) cannot conceivably be the words of the Christian writer of the extant text.<sup>4</sup> All this material deserves to be taken seriously, not least because the study to which most scholars still turn is a viciously reductionist analysis made by the Bollandist Paul Peeters in 1928.<sup>5</sup>

Peeters tried to discredit virtually everything. His work was subsequently attacked by M. J. Lagrange,<sup>6</sup> and its implausibility was assumed by G. G. Blum in his 1969 book on Rabbula,<sup>7</sup> still the only comprehensive treatment in existence. But Peeters's work continues to be cited, as recently by Pierre-Louis Gatier in his valuable discussion of Syrian topography in the life of Alexander Akoimētos.<sup>8</sup> Gatier has unearthed many allusions to the known landscape of Syria in that

3. Bickell, *Ausgewählte Schriften der syrischen Kirchenväter, Aphraates, Rabbulas und Isaak von Ninive*, 166–211. Robert Doran of Amherst College is planning a translation of the entire life into English. In preparing the present chapter, I had made my own translation of the work as far as Rabbula's appointment as bishop of Edessa, and I quote from that version here. But Professor Doran was kind enough to read over this chapter for me, and my renderings have been much improved by his acute criticism. Although I had thought of publishing my partial translation as an appendix, it now seems far more prudent to leave to Professor Doran the publication of a definitive rendering of the whole.

4. *Life of Rabbula*, 161.13.

5. Peeters, "Vie de Rabboula."

6. Lagrange, "Bulletin."

7. Blum, *Rabbula von Edessa*, 3, 17 (nn. 11 and 14), 20 (n. 25), 31 (n. 75). The most recent comment on Rabbula may be found in Drijvers, "Man of God of Edessa." Drijvers considers the life "idealized" (p. 242), a characterization that may perhaps be defensible for the account of Rabbula's career in Edessa but not for the earlier part. The disjunction between the two parts might be worth exploring in greater detail.

8. Gatier, "Moine sur la frontière."

highly fictionalized account, and his example should encourage a new look at the Rabbula life, which must have been composed at the latest only a little more than a century after the great man's death. The presence of suspected or demonstrable error or fiction in an ancient text does not automatically mean that nothing can be trusted there. The writer who made the error or devised the fiction will inevitably betray his own knowledge of the world about which he writes, and that can often be important for a historian. An imperfect narrator may nonetheless get certain things right, and the biographer of Rabbula is better than most.

So saints' lives, like martyrs' acts and novels, have something to tell us. The life of Rabbula is uncommonly eloquent in its first part. Even before he begins his story, the author outlines the purpose of his writing in a way that illuminates the whole concept of biography in late antiquity. He is evidently working in Edessa and addressing his brethren in a monastery. The work opens as follows: "My brothers, in the zeal of the love of Christ we are painting before you, by means of writings, an icon of the splendid career of lord Rabbula, the bishop, the glory of our city, so that he might be to us and to all generations a model that excites us to imitate his goodness."<sup>9</sup> Greek biographical tradition was well acquainted with parallels to painting and sculpture. Plutarch, in the second chapter of his biography of Cimon, compares the responsibility of portrait painters (ζωγραφοῦντες) to his task when it comes to the representation of imperfections. But the Syriac writer is not making a comparison. He declares that he is painting an icon in words.

Since the word εἰκὼν in Greek and, in transliteration, also in Syriac can mean both an image in the round and a painted one, we must be sure that the reference here is actually to a painting. That can be guaranteed not only from the verb the writer employs (*ṣār*) but from a comparable phrase some lines below in which he uses another verb (*ršam*) with the meaning "to sketch out." Here he says, "It is our proper duty to sketch out an agreeable remembrance of his (Rabbula's) divine career, so that for us and for all generations there will be an image of his victories, a stimulating model to imitate. Just as with the excellent Fathers and their famous victories—in the past and in recent

9. *Life of Rabbula*, 159.4–8.

times—we lift up images of their triumphs, so by means of the writings in my books do we give an incarnation of sanctity.”<sup>10</sup> This elaboration of the opening point leaves no doubt of the identification of the text with a painted icon used in cult.

The references to the victories of Rabbula and the earlier saints led the unfortunate Bickell to label this work a panegyric, and the label has taken hold in some quarters,<sup>11</sup> but obviously this language is, as we shall soon see in greater detail, simply drawn from a metaphor of the stadium and amphitheater that is an important part of Christian rhetoric. The work begins with the birth of Rabbula, traces his life and career, and ends with his death. It is plainly the biography of a saint and therefore rightly assigned to the category of hagiography. But the invocation of drawing or painting icons may be useful in further refining our understanding of the development of the genre.

In a well-known passage at the beginning of his *Alexander*, Plutarch emphasizes that he is writing βίοι, not ιστορίαι, but, as Arnaldo Momigliano and others have observed, neither Plutarch nor anyone else used the term βιογραφία in extant Greek literature before its appearance in Damascius's life of Isidore toward the end of the fifth century.<sup>12</sup> Damascius declares that he will include in his work only those μέτρα βιογραφίας (“elements of biography”) that he believes to be true and heard directly from his teacher. The word is obviously not a neologism in this passage, but it is perhaps of some significance that its first extant appearance occurs in a Syrian author.

The representation of the biography of Rabbula as itself a painting or drawing—as opposed to something similar to a painting or drawing—can be explained in terms of the ambivalence of the Greek verb γράφειν, meaning both “to write” and “to draw (or paint).” No such ambivalence exists in the Syriac vocabulary. The biographer of Rabbula seems to have exploited the γραφία-element in βιογραφία with the sense it has in ζωγραφία. He emphasizes that in order to paint (šār) or to draw (ršam) his εἰκόν he has to write (ktab). In other words, the metaphor that dominates the author's description of his work in

the account of Rabbula reflects, it may be suggested, the inherent ambivalence of the phrase βίους γράφειν or the late coinage βιογραφία. No one, least of all Friedrich Leo, ever asked why the Greek noun for biography never shows up before Damascius despite the survival of a rich biographical literature. Rabbula's biographer may give us the answer: it would have looked too much like ζωγραφία.

Fifth-century play with the two senses of γράφειν can, in fact, be documented precisely in Syria from the prologue to Theodoret's lives of the Syrian ascetics: ἡμεῖς δὲ βίον μὲν συγγράφομεν φιλοσοφίας διδάσκαλον . . . , ζωγραφοῦμεν δὲ οὐ τῶν σωμάτων τοὺς χαρακτῆρας . . . , ἀλλὰ τῶν ἀοράτων ψυχῶν τὰς ἰδέας σκιογραφοῦμεν.<sup>13</sup> We are writing a life, says Theodoret, as instruction in philosophy, but we are not painting physical features: rather we are sketching out spiritual forms. Theodoret's Greek moves between writing and painting or drawing, as if the activity is the same. He is at pains to define the objectives of his work, the nature of the lineaments he will set forth.

The characterization of the life of Rabbula as a recitation of victories depends, we have already noted, upon a rich agonistic metaphor that was deeply rooted in Christian thought. Louis Robert has commented in detail on this in his analysis of the martyrdom of Perpetua and the heavenly agonothete who presides over her final moments.<sup>14</sup> In presenting his ascetics in Syria, Theodoret explicitly alludes to the Olympic games, its athletes and pancratiasts to provide parallels to the victories of his monks. The subjects of his biographies carry off the crown of victory, but in their case, he says, it was not their nature that brought them their victory (παρεῖχε δὲ αὐτοῖς τὴν νίκην οὐχ ἡ φύσις) but divine grace.<sup>15</sup>

The imagery of contest and triumph is as important for the Syriac biographer of Rabbula as it is for Theodoret. At the beginning, Rabbula is introduced “as a competitor in the stadium of justice.”<sup>16</sup> The Greek word for stadium appears here in transliteration. A few lines farther on we read, “In all his life the spirit of God remained with him until he took from all the contests with evil the crown of uprightness.” The word for contests is ὁ γυνῆν, ἀγῶνες, and the crown is the athlete's

10. *Life of Rabbula*, 160.5–11.

11. E.g., Gattier, “Moine,” 445: “Panégyrique de Rabboula.”

12. Momigliano, *Development of Greek Biography*, 12; Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 6, n. 11. It is odd that Friedrich Leo, who was aware of the relevant passage in Damascius, seems not to have been interested in its new vocabulary (*Griechisch-römische Biographie*, 266). Cf. Damascius, *Vita Isid.* 8: ἀλλ' οἷα μέτρα βιογραφίας, αὐτὰ μόνα, ἅπερ ἀληθῆ εἶναι πιστεύω καὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ καθηγεμόνος ἀκρίκοι, προφερόμενος.

13. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa*, prol. 3 (PG 82: 1285C/D), Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, eds., *Theodoret de Cyr: Histoire* 1: 130.

14. Robert, “Vision de Perpétue martyre à Carthage en 302.”

15. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa*, prol. 5 (1288B) 1:132 Canivet-Leroy-Molinghen.

16. *Life of Rabbula*, 159.8.

crown (which of course also provided the metaphor for the martyr's crown). The biographer later uses the expression "spiritual athlete" to describe his subject when he was tested after conversion. Adorned with his crown of victory, Rabbula is said to be worthy of God.

A particularly striking use of the agonistic metaphor occurs near the beginning of the biography after Rabbula first becomes aware of the healing powers of monks living in the vicinity of his family property around Chalcis. We read, "When he heard the good report of His signs, there fell upon his soul like *'wkyns* the sound of His victories."<sup>17</sup> The Syriac word is clearly a transliteration of a Greek word, and these letters are known to the lexica as representing either ὄγκινος (hook, from Latin *uncinus*) or ὠκεανός (ocean). The manuscript shows supralinear double dots (the Syriac *syāmē*) for this word, and they normally indicate a plural. It would produce a grotesque interpretation if we understand "hook" here ("the sound of God's victories fell on his soul like hooks"), although Brockelmann and others seem to credit this, but "oceans" would take us properly and convincingly again to the stadium or amphitheater. A well-documented Greek acclamation in late antiquity was ὠκεανέ, apparently invoking lavishness and prodigality (like the ocean).<sup>18</sup> The sound of God's victories would therefore be compared with the cries of the audience in praise of all that God made possible, and we may perhaps have here an implicit role for God as agonothete, just as in the case of Perpetua. The news of God's miracles fell upon Rabbula's soul like a wave of acclamations in the stadium.

After the prefatory remarks about the purpose and nature of the biography, as well as a brief celebration of the bishop's achievements, the author proceeds briskly with an account of Rabbula's family and childhood. This is full of interest: "The blessed Rabbula was a pagan from his childhood, because his father was also a pagan and a priest. Through him the apostate Julian dedicated, as they say, his spirit to demons while he was on his way to fight with the Persians. But the mother of Rabbula was a believer, and she struggled with her husband to make him turn to the fear of the Messiah. Although she labored unceasingly, she was unable to convert his rebellious will to

17. *Ibid.*, 161.14.

18. Overall, Roueché, "Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire." For references and bibliography on ὠκεανέ as an acclamation, see J. and L. Robert, *Bulletin épigraphique* 1958: 105. Above all, Peterson, "Die Bedeutung der ὠκεανέ-Akklamation."

the truth."<sup>19</sup> A few lines later we are told that Rabbula's parents were "rich magnates of their city, Qennishrîn."

The city is known to classical sources as Chalcis and was renowned in late antiquity as a center of Neoplatonic polytheism. It had been the home of Iamblichus, whose pupil Aedesius had been a teacher of Julian. The alleged participation of Rabbula's father in some kind of ritual with Julian is therefore eminently credible, despite the extreme skepticism of Peeters. Julian departed from Antioch for the Euphrates on March 5, 363, and we know from a letter he wrote to Libanius that he first stopped at Litarba on the road leading east from Antioch.<sup>20</sup> The same letter reports that he went to Aleppo and sacrificed a white bull on its imposing acropolis. From Aleppo he passed through Banae to arrive at Hierapolis Bambyce five days after his departure from Antioch. No source names Chalcis as a stop on his itinerary, and Ammianus states that Julian went to the Euphrates *solitis itineribus*,<sup>21</sup> which ought to imply the direct road from Litarba to Aleppo without a diversion to the south. But Chalcis is not at all far from Aleppo and was connected to it by road.<sup>22</sup> A wealthy pagan priest in Neoplatonist Chalcis would have had every reason to make the short trip up to Aleppo to see the world's first Neoplatonist emperor and Iamblichus's spiritual descendant.

The affluence and importance of Rabbula's family appears to be reflected in the title of πατὴρ πόλεως ascribed to Rabbula himself by the biographer of Alexander Akoimētos.<sup>23</sup> In an undoubtedly fictional scene, in which a militantly pagan Rabbula debates with Alexander, this title has a ring of authenticity. As Denis Feissel and Gilbert Dagron have shown through their collection of epigraphic testimonia, the title is well attested in late antiquity as an honor for a leading citizen of a city, and although no epigraphical documentation has appeared for it in Syria, it has turned up in Phoenicia, where it was still in use in the seventh century.<sup>24</sup> The Greek biographer of Alexander reinforces his citation of this title with the observation that Rabbula's

19. *Life of Rabbula*, 160.11–19.

20. Julian, *Epist.* 98, 399b–402b, pp. 180–84.

21. Amm. Marc. 23.2.6.

22. Cf. Dussaud, *Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale*, 476–77 with carte XIV.

23. *Life of Alexander Akoimētos*, II, 664.14.

24. Feissel, "Appendice 1," in Dagron and Feissel, *Inscriptions de Cilicie*, 215–20, with the evidence for Rabbula and the Phoenician text on p. 218.



family was distinguished by wealth and rhetoric. The Syriac biographer similarly mentions the wealth of the household, and its concern with rhetoric is implicit in his assertion that the young Rabbula was "educated in the books of the Greeks." Sebastian Brock has recently reminded us that Greek was the language of power in Syrian cities, and of Rabbula he observes that "he would no doubt have enjoyed a distinguished secular career had he not converted to Christianity."<sup>25</sup> Although Rabbula communicated in Syriac for most of his adult life, his command of Greek is not in doubt. He spoke in that language when he went to Constantinople, and he is reported to have translated into Syriac some Greek letters by Cyril of Alexandria.<sup>26</sup>

The nexus of wealth, Greek rhetoric, polytheism, and civic leadership at Chalcis emerges vividly from this testimony and illuminates one of the thriving centers of paganism in late fourth-century Syria. It is known that there was a small Christian community there at that time, and obviously Rabbula's mother belonged to it. Although power lay with the Hellenized pagans, the union of Rabbula's parents attests to the possibility of mixed marriages. His mother was evidently a strong woman. She was certainly persistent. We learn from the Syriac life that she made sure her baby was suckled by a Christian wet nurse, and when the time came she ensured that Rabbula took a Christian as his wife—thereby producing a mixed marriage in the next generation. But up to this point her efforts did not bring the ultimate success of conversion. To some extent she seems to have been thwarted by Rabbula's own eminence in the life of Chalcis. Although a committed pagan, he was, we are told, given "a distinguished honorary office" by the emperor himself,<sup>27</sup> and this recognition is reported to have strengthened him in his paganism.

Peeters poured scorn on the reference to the emperor.<sup>28</sup> Since the emperor is not explicitly identified, he judged that the entire testimony was worthless. But, on the contrary, the recognition of influential local citizens by honorary titles was a deeply rooted feature of imperial administration that reached back to the high Roman Em-

25. Brock, "Greek and Syriac in Late Antique Syria." The citation appears on p. 155.

26. Cf. *Life of Rabbula*, viii.

27. *Life of Rabbula*, 161.4–5: *šūltānā . . . men malkā*.

28. Peeters, "Vie de Rabboula," 173.

pire. Plutarch appears to have enjoyed some such recognition.<sup>29</sup> In the fourth century, a titular governorship would probably have taken the form of an honorary *ὑπατεία* such as the new Mesopotamian papyri reveal had been bestowed upon the last Abgar of Edessa in the middle of the previous century.<sup>30</sup> Far from being suspect, this item in the life argues for its closeness to the historical career of its subject.

As the author proceeds in his narrative of Rabbula's conversion, his family estates are the scene for an important moment. When he went out to visit some of his landed properties, Rabbula became aware of the monks whose miracles were the first to impress him. (The properties are indicated by a Syriac transliteration of *χωρία*.) During this tour, at one of the boundaries of his land, directly opposite the open desert, he learned of the blessed Abraham and of monastic brothers known as *ξένοι*, again named by the Greek word in the Syriac.<sup>31</sup> This appellation for ascetic recluses and its correlative verb *ξενητεῖν* are exceptionally rare with this meaning and seem to reflect a local Syrian terminology for detaching oneself from the world. Both in Syriac and in later Greek *'ksny'* / *ξένος* normally means a traveler away from home, a pilgrim, someone who stays in a *ξενοδοχεῖον*. The word *peregrinus* in the Latin West has a similar meaning, and it then goes on to acquire a monastic sense parallel to *ξένος* here.<sup>32</sup> But in the Greek East few texts display this sense, notably a passage in the *Apophthegmata* of the Fathers that shows a comparable use of *ξένος*, where it appears in conjunction with *νηστεύειν* (to fast).<sup>33</sup> The presence of the word in a monastic context in Syria implies local information supplied by the writer or his source.

Next, after learning about Abraham and his *ξένοι*, Rabbula received reports of healings and heard the sounds of God's victories. At this moment, we are told, he began to distance himself from paganism. His conversion is compared with that of Paul, and the Syriac au-

29. Cf. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome*, 29, on the *ornamenta consularia*.

30. Teixidor, "Deux documents syriaques," esp. 147, *scrip. ext. l. 4* (*bhpty' b'rhy*), and 161–62.

31. *Life of Rabbula*, 161.10–11. The technical nature of the term is implied by the author's use of *lam* in introducing it.

32. See Angenendt, *Monachi peregrini*.

33. PG 65: 256C. Philip Rousseau has helpfully pointed out to me that even in this passage *ξενητεῖσαι* is linked to keeping control of one's tongue as much as to fasting, and he compares 373B in which the answer to *τί ἐστὶ ξενιτεία* is *σιῶσα*. But this only serves to reinforce the ascetic context.

thor is moved to say that just as Paul was changed "from Judaism to the truth, so too was Rabbula from paganism to Christianity." Since the truth and Christianity are manifestly the same thing, we are left to infer that in the writer's mind at least Judaism and paganism were comparable falsehoods.

The real estate of Rabbula again figures prominently in the aftermath of his baptism. After receiving instruction from Eusebius, the bishop of Chalcis, and Acacius, the bishop of Aleppo, he had gone to the Holy Land to be baptized in the river Jordan. Once he had emerged from the water and the sign of the Cross had appeared on his white linen in the color of Christ's blood, he felt himself ready to return to Chalcis and dispose of all his worldly possessions. And, in view of his social position, they were many. But we are told that the newly baptized Rabbula "made preparation as he vowed and like a wise merchant who had gone after precious pearls, when he found a pearl which he trusted, he went and sold everything he had."<sup>34</sup> This transparent allusion to Jesus' parable of the merchant who found a pearl of great price introduces Rabbula's uncompromising acceptance of Jesus' pronouncement, "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life."<sup>35</sup> A strict application of this doctrine was certainly not universal among Christians in the fourth century, and some Christian apologists from Paul to Augustine felt obliged to mitigate its force in the interest of spreading the Word and enlarging the Christian population.

But what Rabbula gave up shows what he had had before. We read, "He sold his gold and silver, and he distributed to the poor everything he possessed. . . . Next he sold off his lands, and he properly distributed his revenues from them to the poor, so that by this means his deposit would grow into a treasure in heaven, and his investments would be protected with profit accruing."<sup>36</sup> The specificity of this allusion to heavenly treasure is startling and moved G. G. Blum to observe, "Der Gedanke vom Schatz im Himmel wird dann phantasievoll in finanz-technischer Terminologie ausgedehnt, er ist ein

34. *Life of Rabbula*, 165.22–24.

35. Matt. 13.45–46 (merchant); 19.29 (forsaking all).

36. *Life of Rabbula*, 165.24–26, 166.14–17.

Kapital, das Zinsen bringt."<sup>37</sup> Presumably investments were familiar to the pagan Rabbula, and language of this kind could reflect his own account of his actions.

The record of the disposition of his property continues, "Next he freed all his slaves, those who had been born in his house and those who had been bought with money. He provisioned each and every one of them and released them in peace. Some he admonished, instructed, and sent to monasteries." The two categories of slaves, domestic and bought, correspond precisely to the reality of the region, as can be demonstrated from newly published Mesopotamian documents concerning the sale of slaves.<sup>38</sup> A domestic slave is there called by the familiar term *oikogeneis*, and a bought slave *agoragōnētos*. In the biography, the former term is rendered literally as *ylidy byth* (born in his house), and it thereby proves incidentally that the Greek expression cannot mean, as sometimes thought, simply "slave by birth" (not necessarily in the house of his master). Interestingly, the latter term is not found at all in Egyptian documents (where *ōnētōs* is normal), but it precisely mirrors the Syriac in the Rabbula life (*zbhyny ksph*, bought with money). Thus we seem to have an authentically Syrian locution for a bought slave.

But what Jesus had never explicitly prescribed was the freeing of slaves. So enlightened a gesture, humane as it was, nonetheless arose from a recognition of slaves as personal property that had to be disposed of along with everything else. Certainly, humane feelings could hardly characterize what Rabbula did next. He took Jesus at his word. We read, "As for his blessed mother, he took away everything she possessed. She rejoiced and put on the yoke of the Messiah. He also dispossessed his wife in the same manner. His children, being small, he instructed and turned over to monasteries." The writer then sums all this up with the following comprehensive statement: "He was separated, as our Lord commanded, from his mother, from his wife, from

37. "The concept of 'treasure in heaven' is fantastically elaborated in the technical language of finance: it is interest-bearing capital" (Blum, *Rabbula*, 25).

38. See documents 6, 7, 8, and 9 in the dossier published by Feissel, Gascou, and Teixidor, "Documents d'archives romaines inédits du Moyen-Euphrate." The terminology for domestic and bought slaves is discussed on p. 27, but without reference to the Rabbula life. In the Syriac parts of these documents, the house slave is called *ylid*, which appeared to encourage the supposition that only birth was at issue, not birth in the house of the master: "elle ne contient pas d'allusion à la maison, mais on ne peut nier que cette terminologie ne présente encore quelque obscurité." The Rabbula formulation (with *byth*) would seem to resolve the problem.

his sons and daughters, from his lands and all his possessions, from his guests and from his slaves, from his friends, from everything he owned in the world."<sup>39</sup> Nothing could make clearer just how much he had possessed before all this happened.

The geographical context of Rabbula's spiritual awakening is, apart from the trip to the Holy Land, central Syria. His first intimations of the healing power of Christ are followed by conversations with the known and independently attested bishops of Chalcis and Aleppo. At a sensitive moment in Rabbula's instruction, Acacius, bishop of Aleppo, obliges him to pray at the shrine of Cosmas and Damian. Even Peeters had to acknowledge that this item referred to an authentic martyrion in the region. It was located at Cyrrhus to the north of Aleppo at a distance of about a day's travel, and it enjoyed such renown that Cyrrhus itself acquired the name of Hagiopolis.<sup>40</sup> Subsequently Acacius, together with Eusebius, bishop of Edessa, took Rabbula to the cell of the holy Marcian, another well-documented feature of the late fourth-century Syrian ecclesiastical landscape. Only the Abraham who dwelled at the edge of Rabbula's family land cannot be found in other sources. But overall the picture of bishops, monks, and martyrion in the territory dominated by Aleppo is wholly recognizable.

It was from the three principal cities—Aleppo, Chalcis, and Cyrrhus—that Rabbula made his ascetic forays into the desert. At the time of his greatest trials, after his visit to Jerusalem and his disposal of his family, Rabbula undertook to emulate the desert experiences of Antony. His biographer says that he went for the purpose into the *madbrā gawāyā*, the inner desert.<sup>41</sup> This phrase provides strong and incontrovertible proof of the interpretation of the classical terms, *interior limes* and ἐσώτερον λίμνον, which have been much discussed in recent years. In the late 1970s, Benjamin Isaac, Mariano Malavolta, and I all suggested that the evidence suggested that the adjective *inner* meant a more remote region, rather than (as often thought) a nearer one.<sup>42</sup> The words in the Syriac life of Rabbula demonstrate

39. *Life of Rabbula*, 166.25–167.1.

40. Peeters, "Vie de Rabboula," 174. Cf. Dussaud, *Topographie*, 471. For the name Hagiopolis, Georg. Cyp., ed. Gelzer, p. 148.

41. *Life of Rabbula*, 168.13.

42. For references see Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 104, no. 41, already noting the phrase in the biography of Rabbula. See also Liebeschuetz, "Defences of Syria in the Sixth Century."

that this is indeed the sense and show its author to have been in touch with a late antique usage that is perhaps most familiar in Ammianus's once problematic phrase *interiores limites*.<sup>43</sup>

Another detail of Syrian geography confirms the author's intimate knowledge of the area even more strikingly. After forsaking family and possessions, Rabbula moved in with Abraham and his brethren. Among these was another Eusebius, who, we are told, was "the man whom the holy Rabbula made bishop in Tela, the victorious city."<sup>44</sup> Tela was the Semitic name for the city called Constantina (or occasionally Constantia) in the fourth century and later. It will be familiar to readers of Procopius. It lay in the vicinity of Edessa and was therefore subject to Rabbula's jurisdiction when he was bishop there. But why is it called "the victorious city"? The answer can be found in a fragment of the historian Uranius, as preserved in Stephanus of Byzantium: Νικηφόριον· οὕτως ἡ Κωνσταντῖνα ἢ περὶ Ἑδεσαν πόλις.<sup>45</sup> This is very specialized information, unknown both to other ancient sources and to all modern accounts. The name was given most probably to the city in the Hellenistic age, which saw a Nicephorion at Raqqa, a Nicephorion river near Tigranocerta, and a Nicephorion sanctuary at Pergamum. The epithet "victorious" for the city of Tela in the life of Rabbula proves that its author was, like Uranius, acquainted with this early name for Tela/Constantina and adds considerable support to his credibility.

Another highly unusual expression in the life, although neither geographical nor topographical, also appears to reflect specialized knowledge that could not be part of a legendary or fictional fabrication. It appears in the vivid description of Rabbula's baptism in the Jordan. The writer says, "The linen on his body was wrapped as is customary for the spiritual bridegrooms of Christ."<sup>46</sup> Women as brides of Christ are familiar in the annals of early Christianity, but male bridegrooms are most assuredly not. Blum, in noting this *mystisch-*

43. Amm. Marc. 23.5.1.

44. *Life of Rabbula*, 167.20–22.

45. Jacoby, *FGH* 3.675, F 29, discussed in detail by the present writer with full references in an article on Glaucus and Uranius contributed to a Heidelberg colloquium on *Fragmentsammlungen* in 1995; Bowersock, "Jacoby's Fragments and Two Greek Historians." I was not shown proofs for this article, and as a result it contains more than a dozen typographical errors. But fortunately they are all too obvious (such as "Fulf" for "Gulf") and can therefore be easily corrected by an attentive reader.

46. *Life of Rabbula*, 165.6–8.

*bräutliche Vereinigung mit Christus*, says simply that such a *Brautmystik* is unknown to monastic tradition, although he is aware of one passage in the Gospel of Thomas as a parallel: "Many stand before the door, but only a solitary man may enter the bridal chamber."<sup>47</sup> Another *logion* near the end of the same gospel seems to resume this idea: "When the bridegroom leaves the bridal chamber, let them fast and pray." A more striking example can be found among the heresies described by Irenaeus, who describes a rite of the Valentinians in which men entered a *sponsale cubiculum* (νομφών) to be joined in a spiritual marriage with Christ.<sup>48</sup>

Such a mystical marriage of a male with Christ certainly need not be interpreted along the lines of John Boswell's controversial exegesis of the ἀδελφοποίησις ceremony.<sup>49</sup> It may perhaps presuppose a kind of spiritual devotion between males that is most conspicuous, as Boswell saw, in the cult of Saints Sergius and Bacchus—a cult anchored in Syrian and Mesopotamian culture, with its great center at Rusafa near the Euphrates. We should remember as well that, at the end of the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus is reported to have said: "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male. . . . For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven." The literature on Thomas, particularly the Gospel and the Acts, most probably took shape in Syria in the area of Edessa, where there was a martyrdom of Thomas.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, the surprising appearance of bridegrooms of Christ in the life of Rabbula cannot be a fictional invention. It should be considered still another confirmation of the author's intimate knowledge of Syrian Christianity of the time.

In the final period of Rabbula's career before his episcopate at Edessa, he conceived a great desire for martyrdom. After his struggles with Satan in the remote desert, this new Antony joined the blessed Eusebius, the future bishop of Tela, to travel together to Ba'albek, described in the biography as "the city of the pagans." There the two went straight to what is identified as "the temple of graven images . . . in order to do something worthy of martyrdom."<sup>51</sup> They presumably

47. Blum, *Rabbula*, 23 with n. 36; *Evang. Thom.* 75.

48. Iren., *Adversus haereses* 1.21.3.

49. Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions*.

50. Drijvers, "Early Syriac Christianity," esp. 171. Cf. J. D. Turner, introducing his translation of the book of Thomas the Contender, in *Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. Robinson, 188.

51. *Life of Rabbula*, 169.26–170.2.

undertook to desecrate the images. Peeters is grossly unfair to the author of the biography when he says that Rabbula and Eusebius intended to destroy the temple, "ni plus ni moins."<sup>52</sup> They simply hoped, as the biographer says, to cause enough trouble to be killed by the populace of the city. But God had other plans for both of them. Although they were mercilessly beaten and thrown down a huge staircase when they appeared to be dead, they managed to survive and escape. Anyone who has seen the temple of Zeus Heliopolitanus at Ba'albek will have little difficulty in recognizing the monumental staircase of its propylaea as the scene of these horrors.

God withheld the martyr's crown from these two future bishops. "They endured the torments of death as they had sought them, but they did not die in martyrdom as they expected," Rabbula's biographer observes.<sup>53</sup> This interesting indication of the social status of martyrs is another sign of the changing character of eastern Christianity. A Polycarp or a Pionios in the early Christian centuries had serenely suffered public martyrdom, but men of that kind in late antiquity were more likely to retreat to the desert for a time and then to become bishops. The life of Rabbula is a faithful record of this new world and, in particular, of its contours in central Syria. The author has painted an image of the saint in a realistic landscape.

52. Peeters, "Vie de Rabboula," 177.

53. *Life of Rabbula*, 170.16–17.

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